

clamor

October/November 2000

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one woman's dream of adventure

convergence on the conventions

reports from the DNC and RNC

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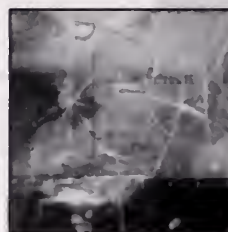
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from the editors

A few people have told us that they think clamor is too diverse. That we should narrow our focus and specialize, that we should carve out a niche by concentrating on a few specific topics.

In a way, this is a compliment. It tells us that we are presenting a wide range of material, that we are not limiting ourselves. On the other hand, these criticisms tell us we are not getting the point of our magazine across to people.

What we are encouraging, through clamor, is not solely more discussion of the topics presented, nor are we promising the most far-reaching or in-depth treatments of these ideas. Every section we cover here deserves its own magazine hell, even every topic. Casey Boland's article on agribusiness, for example, could be expanded and analyzed, and there are a million different facets and arguments and points of view to be dissected.

That is not what we are trying to do. We are advocating a different way of reading, and writing magazines. We are challenging the notion that it is possible, or even desirable, for there to be an authoritative voice on the general state of "things." Inevitably, such an "authority" will exclude countless versions of reality, and we all know what kinds of voices will be excluded for the sake of an authoritative voice.

So the result of a magazine that privileges destabilizing authority is a sometimes overwhelming diversity of opinions, ideas and experiences. And doesn't that more accurately reflect the lives we live daily and the interactions we have with each other on a regular basis? We have, from day one, approached clamor with the understanding that it is not our intention to create a magazine that is a self-contained unit.

Instead, we see our role as editors being very similar to that of community organizers. Organizers approach a community that may have several needs to be addressed, they listen to the people, help them prioritize their needs, and then help implement a plan of action that addresses those needs. At no time does the community organizer pretend that he or she knows what is best for the community he or she is working with. And although the community may rally around a certain plan of immediate action, it would be absurd to think that the needs and interests of a community are at any time one-dimensional.

Another task of community organizers is to help a group of people articulate their ideas or problems in a forum that will be most useful in getting them addressed. Sometimes these ideas or problems aren't clearly formulated yet or else they may seem fairly inaccessible. Rather than dismiss these for their crudeness, an organizer recognizes the importance of these ideas and does his or her best to get the community heard. So too, do we often deal with contributions to clamor that mainstream magazines would dismiss because either the ideas are "inaccessible," or the writing is "grammatically unsound," or otherwise "underdeveloped." Which is why we feel that working with people to get their ideas in print is all the more relevant and necessary in today's political and cultural climate.

So without pretending that our work as editors is as tireless and necessary as that of community organizers, you can at least see where we are coming from when we put together an issue of clamor. With this magazine we are trying to impress upon you a general attitude, a more comprehensive critique of our society and our lives. We hope that Vique Martin's trip to Africa and the accounts of the DNC and RNC protests inspire you to action and to follow your dreams. We hope that the story of Andrew McLeod's vasectomy and Richard Gilman-Opalsky's marriage encourage you to question tradition and societal expectations. We hope the interviews with Aaron Rose and Martin Sorrendeguy will remind you how important it is to gain inspiration from others. We hope all the articles we select, each in their own way, embody this attitude... and we hope you come away with a glimpse of it.

Thanks for reading,

Jason K. Jen Angel



clamor

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Letters

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clamor,

Hey, first off, many thanks for sending me the new issue of *clamor* (August/September). It was well worth the \$1.13 I had to pay the postman for postage due (they charge to forward 4th class mail) ten times over. I really enjoyed the articles about the birth, the film about *Mr. Death*, kid chaos, and the trip to Kenya. I thought the saving animals, museum of rock, and art cars articles were all interesting but not that super. I thought the "Oreo Cookie Feminist" article was terrible and really only serves, in my mind, to hurt the cause of official Feminists with its pettiness and overall ridiculously self-important tone. I'm aware that any attack on a feminist makes someone a misogynist, but I feel like I really support feminist ideals, and her article just seemed so trite. She let 3 years go by before ever confronting the man who attempted to kiss her, and just really handled the uncomfortable situation in the worst possible manner. All of this would go by without comment from me if I did not end up reading the minutely detailed drama-queen-soap-opera-ish 4 and a half pages (of small text with few illustrations) in the zine. Not that big a deal, but I had to vent. I also thought the cover design was very good, excellent use of three colors. I have to admit that I didn't read any of the voting articles because I truly have no interest in the issue, but that's just me.

Hank Chinaski

clamor,

I read most of the new *clamor* last night, just wanted to say congratulations! I think that the experiment of running multiple pieces on voting is your greatest success so far. The layout, page size trim down, and cover are amazing. I am super-impressed with this one, though my favorite is still the first, because I'm old school. I think this is the first issue where it is easy to get the flow, and see the bigger purpose of the magazine. Whereas in the past I sort of drifted from article to article like an anchorless boat. Both are good ways to think, but I think *clamor* really stands out now, I think most people read magazines very quickly, and if you keep a

steady repetition of a theme or issue like you did with the voting issue, it makes people focus more because a) there is more to read, and b) variables on theme tend to attract (obviously) a larger amount of readers from various backgrounds. In other words the new *clamor* is the bomb.

Ed Gore

clamor,

In response to "A Yankee in King Cotton's Court," (June/July)

I was hoping for Mobile or Savannah. I would have even moved to Huntsville if I had to, but since I go where the Boss Man says, I ended up in the north.

The North! Home of all the writers and intellectuals who have consistently represented the South with the colonizer's gaze; we are primitive, a little frightening, mysterious, uncultured, less-evolved, non-educated, other. We are a separate country, somewhere tourists pass through on their way to Florida, and a haven for industrialists looking for places to relocate for cheap labor and less stringent environmental laws.

Sadly, the North was my destiny. I drove with trepidation, and ate at a Perkins (we don't have them down South so they must be exotic). The waitress said, "What do you want sir?" in a quick staccato voice full of impatience, as if to fulfill some stereotype. My omelet was made with that plastic-like cheese that sticks to the roof of your mouth, just like the Waffle House back home.

Northerners, what a surprise, every time I speak and they hear my southern girl accent they immediately become condescending and paternalistic - everyone knows Southerners are stupid. As I walk down the street, I see Northerners on cell phones, racing down the sidewalks, late, late, late! They frown with their brows furrowed, ties tied tight around their necks, bumping into old ladies and not even apologizing. They yell, "Sell, Sell, Sell!" to their brokers in a constant rush for money.

Check it out! Over there on a little island

surrounded by freeways. Projects! It couldn't be that poverty and race are still issues up here! And look at that! Suburban public schools are all white and well-supplied, but please don't call it segregation. This is the North!

So, what is my plan up here in Yankeeland? To observe only the surface of things in a removed and superior tone but to act like I am making new discoveries, thinking deeply and making relevant social and historical observations. And I plan to hold tightly on to my credit card, my bank card and checkbook so that I can afford to live in the narrow provincialism of my new-found home, the North.

Betty Ann

clamor,

Congratulations on creating a magazine that has been exciting me these past few hours as I've been reading it and scanning the articles. It's definitely refreshing in a market that is either new age, heavy politics, health and healing or your myriad of professional magazines that are either totally intellectual to the point of being banal or so academic that they are worthless to read. The articles are cool and the last letter from Brob is a bit quirky. Four dollars is not that expensive. Most of the ones I have been looking at are \$5.95. She (or he) might be thinking of *Time* or *Newsweek* ... and yes I sort of agree with her idea of focus but hey, you are only 3 issues young ... that can be expected and it can be seen as a typical growing thing for a magazine that seeks writers of all sizes and talents.

I found your zine in San Diego at the Controversial Bookstore. I also publish a magazine and as soon as I get back to San Luis Obispo I will send you a number of our back issues since some of the material overlaps your interests.

All for now,

Good luck to you,

Bob Banner

Publisher of *HopeDance Magazine: Creating Sustainability on the Central Coast*

clamor,

In the past few months, I've been pleased to see that my article on punk and the abolition of the White race in *clamor* has attracted so much discussion.

I'll take this opportunity to respond to some of the criticisms, for this idea is not something I take lightly, nor does it come from thin air. What some have called a "muddled idea" is quite logical, and I'll further it as best I can.

For those just joining the conversation, I am referring to the idea of fluidity of identity—particularly that of race. I believe that race, formally defined, does not exist, as it was a creation of colonizers and slave traders and owners, who pimped the idea that "race" determined one's intelligence, to create a social caste system in the West based on shades of color, with its creators inevitably at the top. Years later, scientists proved that "race" in fact did not exist: that there are no real differences in the way any of us are wired! (This is not to say that "racism" doesn't exist, nor that there are not a variety of vibrant cultural groups alive and well in American society.)

We are at a total loss to define White culture (white bread? commercialism? Velveeta?) And, as Marlon Riggs points out in his amazing documentary "Black Is...Black Ain't," Blackness isn't as set in stone as one might think. He asks folks across the diaspora to determine the common thread of Blackness

("the ingredient in the gumbo") and in the end, he still comes up still asking, because Blackness IS a such a diversity and a jumble of so many eclectic and often opposing things.

So, if race, as we understand it through this definition (without relation to "culture" or "peoples") does not exist, one can begin to understand how much one's identity is constructed by appearance: 1) how one is seen (voyeurism) and 2) how one chooses to represent their being.

The privileges that a White person receives because of the false caste system set up hundreds of years ago are numerous, insidious and nearly invisible to the untrained White eye (any person of color could list them off in a second). Knowing this exists and one is profiting off the segregation of others can seem overwhelmingly nauseating and insurmountable. Often the first step in understanding it is to sit on it: Think about your privilege. Hold it up to the light and turn it in your hand. Know it, or else it will devour you. This period of self-realization is important; but one must not wallow in guilt. During that pen- sive period, I (quietly) advocated for Whites to drop out of the media, to shut up for once, and listen to the voices of color that were so intensely closed out from the mainstream, and, sadly, the "left" media. (I volunteered months of my time doing leg work for media events for groups of color, all the while refusing to ever speak a word FOR them.)

I still believe in this. But I also think we have to keep moving, and, as a so-called White,

actively work to dismantle the system of White privilege.

From these ideas, it occurred to me that if identity is a function of how one is seen, can we manipulate the way we are viewed to break down walls of "Black" and "White?" Think about the way sexuality and gender roles have been bent and twisted in so many different directions, to the point where we shy from defining anyone as anything anymore. In the anthology *Queers in Space*, (1) the authors hypothesize that to end homophobia, one must create "queered" space: one in which anyone can be anything, and be comfortable. (One can be straight in a queer space.) Historically, that meant the underground: secluded parks, leather bars, and the like—all other space was heterosexist space because within it, one was excluded or grouped by their "alternative lifestyles." One contributor, Jean-Ulrich Désert, cites theorist Judith Butler as saying that "queerness is something that is ultimately beyond gender—it is an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with or limited by notions of binary opposition: the male and female or homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extension of this gender binarism."

Does this parallel the grouping that is just as contrived: "race?" Systemically, space in the US is White space, and anyone who veers from this norm is what we call "of color." How would we create space that is free from these caging definitions, and do so without tampering with things like heritage and culture? How could we "queer" racialized space?

It is not hard to make the leap to thinking about the ways Whites have used physical representation to subvert ideas of sexuality, gender, and basically any label that is ill-fitting. Drag queens and kings, post-op, pre-op, trans, bi, etc. are all terms that have blurred Western sex and sexual roles.

In my article, I list examples of how punks have created new space through words, ideas and even appearance to explore new blurred identities. This action works in two ways: it creates new inclusive space for anyone, and, in an idealized situation, it rejects the racist, sexist, homophobic and classist mainstream culture. Dressing (as well as writing (indy-media) and acting (culture jamming, protest)) in ways that are not considered acceptable in American society works as a way to give a big "fuck-you" to those who participate in the system of white privilege. Those Whites who do not approve just can't understand why you would want to throw those privileges away by looking (and acting) differently!

Many social theorists conclude similarly about the communicative nature of style. In Dick Hebdige's ground-breaking work exploring the history of punk style and its underlying messages, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (2), he says in a chapter titled "Style as intentional communication" that average (Western) style is ul-

timately "expressive of 'normality' as opposed to 'deviance.'" Those deviant in style, on the other hand, display coded messages of going "against the grain of mainstream culture." He quotes Umberto Eco saying, "'not only the expressly intended communication object, but every object may be viewed ... as a sign.'" Later he notes how a subculture's style communicates "significant difference" and a parallel group identity, just as I suggest above — (perhaps a slight but dangerous rearranging of the socially acceptable castes?!))

As Gordon Edgar notes in his letter of response to my article, a White person cannot neatly dispose of their privilege — they can always choose to pick it up again, like a comfy coat. This is true, but it shouldn't be used as an excuse. The notion is a way for the cynical to throw up their hands and say "nothing can be done!" It is a way for jaded White folk to sink deeper into the quagmire of privilege. More insidiously, it suggests that White privilege has always existed and always will. As Noel Ignatiev points out in *How the Irish Became White*, (3) White privilege at one time only applied to some with fair skin. Skin color castes have changed, to eventually encompass Irish, Polish and Jews, which all at one time were considered by American society to be non-white races. So, if White privilege morphs over time, can we not take the reins to change it?

Amanda Luker

(1) edited by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette and Yolanda Retter, 1997

(2) Dick Hebdige, 1979

(3) Noel Ignatiev, 1995

clamor,

I seem to have forgotten to include an important footnote in the final version of my essay "Assets & Liabilities," which you published in June. I would like to thank Kay Leigh Hagan for the image of an orchid in the Arctic depicting the reality of a radical feminist straight women. I was impressed by this image when I read her book, *Fugitive Information*, which I encourage everyone to read.

Sincerely,
Loolwa Khazzoom

clamor contributors

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In addition to being your virtual tourguide to New York's lesser-known landmarks, **Fred Argoff** (p. 24) publishes a zine called *Brooklyn*. He can be reached care of *clamor*.

Matt Average (p. 40) does a hardcore punk zine called *Engine*. Matt's new issue is out now, and he is in the process of starting a boxing magazine which should hopefully be available soon. On top of all that he works at *Flipside*, goes to school, trains at the gym, and is getting a portfolio together for free-lancing. You can write him at PO Box 64666, Los Angeles, CA 90064 or engine98@earthlink.net.

Casey Boland (p. 37, p. 82) works, writes some, and reads a lot. He does a zine called *I Defy* whenever he feels like it and has injected his words and photos into some other zines. Contact him at 614 S. 48th St. Apt 2R, Philadelphia, PA 19143 or rseb@earthlink.net

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Chris Crass (p. 76) is a writer/organizer working to bridge race, class and gender analysis of power with anarchist theory and practice. He has been an organizer with Food Not Bombs for the past 8 years and is currently working with the Challenging White Supremacy Workshop to bring anti-racist organizing into the movements against global capitalism and can be reached at chriscrass1886@hotmail.com.

Mike Delach (p. 53) has been doing a self-published zine called *in abandon* for the past few years. He is often wont to disappear for months at a time (including this summer) on some wild adventure or other. You can write him at PO Box 82192, Tampa, FL 33682.

Sarah Eaton (p. 19) recently completed a children's book about prisons (where her illustrations are from). You can contact her at sarahdanforth@hotmail.com for information about how to get a copy of the book.

Ben Fogelson (p. 73), free-lances, and is also writing *The Handbook for the Practical Ninja*, a novel illustrating a unique and playful approach to mind-body unification, as well as awareness of the affects one has upon one's environment, through action and non-action. He publishes romance stories in *Oregon Cycling* and collaborates on a process called LOVE. He can be reached at diamuid@earthlink.com.

John Gerken (p. 68) is hobo-erotic, smells like freight trains and bike chains. He is currently involved with putting together the *DIY Book with Tree of Knowledge*, as well as various projects concerning handmade maps, which you should make and send to him. He can be reached care of Tree of Knowledge Distribution at PO Box 251766, Little Rock, AR 72225

All of **Richard Gilman-Opalsky's** (p. 61) various moving parts operate under his close discretion. He likes to spend good times with snuggly Robyn and the cuddly cats. He likes to read, make music, and write essays like a mighty ideologue. He studies philosophy at the New School in NYC for the MA and Ph.D. He also seeks to use his hands, legs, and mouth to make noises that draw attention to social, political and economic inequities. He is a pretty skilled wordsmith, and considers his mouth a weapon. Direct all love letters and hate mail to thoughtandaction@yahoo.com

Jane Graham (p. 15) lives in Copenhagen, Denmark and is the author of *Floozy*, (published by Slab-o-Concrete) which is a brash tale of sleazy strip clubs, hitchhiking and Northern England. She publishes the zine *Shag Stamp*, and is a performer sometimes doing a mix of comedy, storytelling and burlesque under the alter ego Minx Grill. She is currently working on a novel set in the lapdancing clubs of Europe. Contact her at minxjane@yahoo.com

Cary Jankx (cover) is 25 and lives in Brooklyn, New York. After graduating from Bowling Green State University with degrees in Music and Digital Media Animation in 1998, he moved to NYC, where he works as a freelance animator in broadcast graphics and 3D animation. He is currently working in collaboration with several writers and filmmakers on an animated short for submission at animation festivals in 2001. Cary is also a member of the experimental, improvisational group, The New York Soft Core (NYSC). For more information on NYSC, collaboration interests in art, animation or music, contact him at crash167@msn.com

Loolwa Khazzoom (www.loolwa.com) (p. 46) is the author of *CONSEQUENCE Beyond Resisting Rape* (see web page to order). She also is the editor of *BEHIND THE VEIL OF SILENCE: Middle Eastern and North African Jewish Women Speak Out*. She is the founder and coordinator of the Jewish Multicultural Curriculum Project, and she has a band, Grrl Monster, which has just recorded a demo CD.

J. Gordon Lamb III (p. 86) has written for *THE FREEMAN* (now called *Ideas On Liberty*) and published *The Atomic Ballroom* zine. His interests lay in economics, philosophy and architecture. He can be reached via email at Ultramod2000@hotmail.com or via snail mail at P.O. Box 1101 Athens, GA. 30603

Andrew McLeod (p. 26) is housebroken and fixed, but somewhat behind on his shots. Great with kids, doesn't bite (unless asked). He lives in Olympia, Washington and can be reached at amcl@iww.org.

Erin McWilliams (p. 26) is an often-itinerant writer who currently lives in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, though she has recently called Columbus, Chicago, and San Francisco her home. You may remember her zine, *Death and Tortillas*. She can be reached care of *clamor*.

Vique Martin (p. 9) transplanted herself from the UK to California to work at a record label. She also has a zine and record label, both called *Simba*, and she contributes regular columns to *HeartattaCk* and other magazines. She can be reached at viquesimba@hotmail.com, and *Simba 13* is available now.

Kevin P.Q. Phelan (p. 19) founded, edits and produces the literary journal *mur-mur*. His nonfiction has appeared in the *New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, *Harper's* and *Z Magazine*. He recently moved from Brooklyn to New Orleans, and can be contacted at kpq@compuserve.com.

Nate Powell (p. 5, p. 86) is what your grade school teacher would refer to as a "self-starter." In addition to running a record label, going to art school, playing music with friends in bands, and publishing numerous zines of his artwork and stories, he is occasionally wrangled into lending his talent to other projects (like this one). He can be reached care of *clamor*.

Seth Adam Price (p. 42) would like to be known as a poor man's John Reed (author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* and the first US citizen to be buried in the Russian Kremlin). As a young communist Seth is a member of Workers World Party (www.workers.org), which is a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist organization committed to fighting for the interests of the international working class. At the age of 23, Seth is an undergraduate history major political science minor at Bridgewater State College. His hobbies include researching history, political science, leisure reading, and listening to music. You can reach Seth via email at sa_price@att.net or at 469 Eldridge St., Fall River, MA 02720.

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My name is Vique Martin and I am 28 years old. I have wanted to go to Africa for six years. I finally realised that ambition with a trip to Kenya and Tanzania. For me one of the main goals was to see real lions (a minor obsession of mine). The best place to see them is on the plains of the Serengeti. So, I went there, finally.

First was a week in Kenya, then a week in Tanzania. I inherited the money to go when my mother died five years ago. This was my "Africa money" and no matter how broke I got I refused to dip into it. It took a long time until I found a friend who had the funds to make such a trip. When I finally found someone, I jumped at the chance. We plotted and planned for a month, bought our tickets, and flew off to Africa two months after that. The whole trip cost around \$2,500. All you need is a friend to travel with, a Rough Guide/Lonely Planet book and the dough. The rest is up to you. I have split the writings up into two parts. This is part two about Tanzania. Part one appeared in August/September issue of Clamor.

alive in

AFRICA

by Vique Martin



An hour or so into Tanzania it looms ahead of us in the clouds.

It's so large it's breathtaking. Mount Kilimanjaro. It's so fucking intense to finally see it. The biggest mountain in Africa is right there, to my left, in all its glory. Sitting on the bus speeding along on the bumpy roads, staring at the view. And I knew it was only the beginning.

This area of Tanzania is so rich with natural beauties it's mind-blowing. Mount Kilimanjaro, the Serengeti and the Ngorongoro Crater are just a few. But these were the ones that I had decided I wanted to see, more than anywhere in the world. And now I am here.

Darkness in Africa seems to come out of nowhere — one minute (around 6:15 p.m.) you notice the light fading — and the next it's pitch black. By the time we enter Arusha, our destination, it's 7 p.m. and really, really dark. Having only been in the two biggest cities in Kenya, we were not really prepared for the town of Arusha. It seemed awfully dark, and it was very quiet, despite it being a Saturday night.

As we disembarked the bus we were met with tourist operators who offered us rides to hotels for free. We declined and found a taxi. After several trips to sold out or overpriced hotels we eventually found one. After checking in I finally started to relax. Driving around in the taxi, having accommodation problems, and feeling like we were in a much more remote location than before, I was actually more scared than at any other time on the trip. It was SO, SO dark. It's hard to explain — we are so used to lights EVERYWHERE. Even the cars drive with only their side lights, not their headlights, on.

Once we were in our own room and it seemed pretty safe, I started to get used to the quiet. Even started to enjoy it. We freshened up and then hit the most recommended restaurant in our Lonely Planet guide — Spices and Herbs Ethiopian restaurant. And what a place! A fairly large, sparsely decorated room, with lots of open doors and a really warm atmosphere, playing Frank Sinatra. Beautiful old-fashioned gramophones were in each corner of the restaurant and there was Ethiopian art everywhere. The owner was a really lovely woman, and we chatted with her before, during and after the meal, which was the best Ethiopian food I've ever had. The beers were to die for.

Feeling like Arusha wasn't such a scary place, we relaxed and enjoyed our evening, which was good, as the next day was a real challenge. We had to book a safari. After talking with some really dodgy people who seemed to have no license as a safari company, we were introduced to a man called Sammy, who the dodgy dude wanted us to have as our driver. He turned out to be extremely non-dodgy and took us to his "real boss," who was a lovely man. We haggled and debated and tried to figure out our options. After a lunch with a friend of a friend, a man called Bobby who lived in Arusha, who gave us advice, we decided to go with "real boss-man" (as he became known to us). We haggled the price some more and debated our choices.

Both of us had envisaged camping on the safari, rather than staying in the nasty lodges that are full of rich Wasungu (African word for foreigners, which we used rather excitedly whilst we were on safari, to refer to other whites (and sometimes ourselves), even though we were never really sure whether it was a neutral or negative term). However, there are only three ways to do a safari. The first option is to stay in little blue nylon tents, which you imagine boy scouts might camp in — not the kind you would imagine would protect you against a lion. The fire is supposed to keep the animals away! Plus, where we were going we were told that the campsite itself was subsided and muddy and really shitty.



Second was the lodge option, which had the advantages of hot showers and a comfortable (?) bed. Third was the kind of camping we had imagined, in heavy green army kind of tents. This is called "luxury camping" and is a much more expensive option than the lodges. Also, we would have had to take a cook with us on the whole trip — which meant another person in the safari land rover (at the moment there was only us two and Sammy, the driver). And we'd heard horror stories of bad cooks, not enough food, and vegetarians having to pick the meat out of casseroles. It sounded like a risk.

So, we took the soft option and went with the lodges, especially because it was the very end of the low season, so it was only going to cost us an extra \$30 each for three nights. It seemed worth it just for the food option — I'm vegan and allergic to yeast, and my travel companion is a strict vegetarian and always hungry. I don't regret our decision at all. It also lessened the chances of getting bitten alive by all of the millions of bugs and malaria carrying mosquitoes. Those damn bastards.

So, we went for it (time was running out) and we handed our dough over. We'd manage to get thrown into the bargain an afternoon (it was now 2 p.m. or so) trip to the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro and we were anxious to set off. We just had such a good feeling for our driver that we just went with this instinct, and we were very lucky. Sometimes it's good to follow one's guts.

The drive to Moshi, and then Marangu, which lead us right to the foot of the mountain, took around two hours. It was beautiful. From about a third of the way we got the best view of Kilimanjaro and we stopped and took pictures. It is a majestic, breathtaking sight. So powerful and just so damn fucking BIG.

We stopped several times actually. We took photos of the fields of sunflowers, the maize and the banana trees. Lush vegetation was everywhere. Everyone that we passed was friendly. Children all waved to the car, especially if they were waved to first. The towns seemed similar to Arusha, which made where we were staying look like a huge city in comparison. There were many people in all of the villages and by the roadside in Tanzania wearing traditional Maasai clothing. The striking image of the people going about their everyday lives wearing the beautiful red clothing is one that reoccurred throughout the region.

As we passed through Marangu we started climbing upwards. We couldn't see the mountain now, as we were driving up the foothills of Kilimanjaro itself. The part where no cars can drive is approximately one third of the way up the almost 6,000 meter-high mountain, and that was our destination. Justin wanted a picture by the sign. The foothills were increasingly beautiful as we climbed higher and higher. The sides of the road were littered with houses and there were people walking everywhere as it was around 5 p.m. People were coming home from

school and work and going on with their everyday lives whilst we drove through them half hanging out the windows in our excitement.

Their response to our invasion of their community was to stop and stare at our vehicle, and look at us until we were out of sight. The children all waved and at one point about ten of them started chasing us up the street shouting “Wasunga, wasunga,” with huge smiles on their faces as they waved to us. People stopped what they were doing and shouted “Jambo, jambo” (hello) as we drove leisurely by. Sometimes people seemed like they were unhappy with our being there, but the second I smiled and waved, they warmed and waved and smiled back. At one point we drove past a large group of ladies, all wearing really brightly coloured clothes and carrying various things on their heads (washing, produce, etc.). They seemed to be cross that we were driving through their community, but I turned to face them as I stuck my whole head and shoulders out of the window and smiled and waved. Their faces all broke into smiles and they raised their hands to wave back. There I was rushing up Mount Kilimanjaro with fifteen local ladies wishing me well. I felt truly lucky.

The actual gate to the mountain was a bit of an anti-climax, but I took some pictures of Justin in front of the sign, and we headed back into the land rover. We had been pummeling Sammy with questions the whole drive and he'd been really informative and solved many mysteries that had been niggling at us regarding African customs. We had talked to him about the Mbege beer that our Lonely Planet book had mentioned, as Justin was curious to try it. It was specific to the Chagga people who live on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro and in and around Moshi. It's made of bananas and millet and you can only buy it there, in their pubs and cafes — not bottled or anything like that.

So, as we drove back down the slopes of the mountain and passed a bar, the men sitting outside shout “Jambo, karibu” to us (hello, welcome). Sammy pulled the land rover to a stop and said we should try some Mbege. As we got out of the car, three little boys came running out and we stopped to photograph them. It was hard as they wouldn't stay still, they were SO excited. We crossed the road and entered the outdoor seating area of the bar. Five men were seated around a large wooden table. Sammy said we should sit and he disappeared inside. One of the old, Chagga men half stood and held out to me a bright blue plastic cup

that was almost the size of a bucket. All the men were smiling warmly and repeatedly greeting and welcoming us in both Swahili and English. Sammy came back out and gestured that we should take it and drink. I insisted that Justin do it first. He's brave when it comes to tasting unknown things. He went for it and said it was pretty good. I followed his example and it was. It's like grainy flat banana-ish beer. It's only about 2 percent alcohol, and we sipped away.

We gave Sammy some money and he went in and bought us some, and brought it to us. The custom, so we learn, is that one person

buys it and everyone shares from the same, extremely large, cup. We bought small ones, and as you can see from the picture taken — they were in no way small. So we shared their cup and then they share ours. Justin and I taking wussy sips, the locals and Sammy taking huge gulps. Sammy's from a different tribe, having grown up about 20 miles south of Arusha, neither Chagga or Maasai, but they welcomed him with open arms. His explanation for this later is that all Tanzanian people love everyone, whether they are from their own tribe or not. Sounds like a great philosophy — shame the rest of the world couldn't learn from them.

So, there we were, sitting a third of the way up Mount Kilimanjaro, sharing buckets of Mbege beer with the local Chagga tribesmen and I felt on top of the world. I'm seated between Justin, my travelling companion, and Sammy,

our driver. I look as though I am so happy I might explode. It was utterly and totally one of the best experiences of my life. The men were so friendly and lovely and spoke incredible English. But I have to confess I don't remember much of the conversation. I was too busy flying high. We talked about where we were from, what we were doing in Africa, how we liked it, where we were going next, and where we had been. They talked about their perspective on hospitality and teased me for not drinking enough beer and they explained how the beer was made. It was so incredible to be welcomed into their community — to be invited in and to share from their communal cup and engage in interesting, and funny conversation. They were making jokes and were such warm-hearted men, and I could have stayed there forever. Sammy pulled us away, as we had a two-hour drive home and he wanted to make the most of the light. I thanked the men and said my farewells, and we were on our way again.

We stopped when we were nearly home to take photos of the sun setting over Mount Meru, which is the mountain that shadows Arusha. It was beautiful, as was the rest of the drive home, but I was exhausted. Another fine Ethiopian feast awaited us before we fell into bed. I was beside myself with excitement, as the following day we were leaving on safari, and I was finally going to make it to the Serengeti. I was finally going to see real lions.

After sorting out the practicalities for the safari (buying supplies, changing some money, etc.) we were on our way. Caught my first sight of coffee plantations — providing the first thrill of the day. It was to be overshadowed in a big way. I was on my way to the Serengeti.

The drive was expected to take around seven hours, of which only the first two were on real roads. The bumpiness turned to insane levels once we hit the dirt roads, but we got used to it after a few hours. The first major view was Lake Manyara. We were heading east in Tanzania, and the lake was to the south of us. We stopped and looked out over the lake from a perfect viewpoint and marveled at its beauty. We could see the dense jungle-type vegetation that surrounded the lake — and we knew — there are elephants there. Just south of Lake Manyara is Tarangire National Park, which is renowned for its large numbers of elephants. Unfortunately, we knew we wouldn't have time to go there. But it was wonderful to see it from a distance.

The next area we passed through was the edge of the Ngorongoro Crater. We drove all around the rim of the Crater, after stopping to admire the view here, and hung out of the land rover, looking for animals. But the vegetation was so thick that we couldn't glimpse anything apart from baboons. Just the excitement of knowing that amongst those trees and bushes were giraffes and elephants and all sorts of creatures, gave me knots in my stomach. But nothing prepared me for what was to come.

The landscape began to change dramatically as we approached our

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d — ation — with the trees becoming sparser and the grass yellowing. We started to see animals — first zebra, then wildebeest and then gazelle and impala. Lots and lots of them started appearing, sometimes alone, sometimes 10 or 20, sometimes one or 200. They were eating and running and jumping and living. They were real animals, with their own existence separate to man. Not fucking caged possessions in some zoo. I haven't been to a zoo since I was eight years old; not a real zoo. So, for me, this was incredible — to see animals. And how I had waited for this day...

After another hour of driving whilst in Ngorongoro National Park we finally reached the entrance to the Serengeti National Park. We handed over our entrance money with pleasure [\$25 per person per day] and headed on in. I didn't even know how I felt to actually be on the Serengeti, finally, after all these years of desire. I just looked around me and soaked it all up.

We hadn't been driving for more than 15 minutes when we saw a couple of other safari vehicles pulled over on the grass on the left-hand side. We joined them and stared with open mouths at the focus of their interest. About 10 feet from us was a cheetah eating a baby gazelle. We stood, with our heads poking out of the top of the safari vehicle, in awe. We took pictures and stared through our binoculars and listened. We watched it eat first all the major organs, and then the stomach, and then started chewing anything. The sound as it ripped the flesh was so loud. It seemed not to give a shit about our intrusion. It was beautiful.

We left the cheetah to enjoy its dinner and went on our way. We had to reach our lodge before sunset as the safaris are not allowed on the roads after dark. Once more we saw safari vehicles ahead of us and I started to hold my breath. I didn't let it out for what seemed like forever, all I recall is someone saying the word "lion" really far away (even though it must have been Justin or Sammy) and I craned my neck trying to see it. Then, there she was, prowling by the side of the road. She was fucking magnificent. Solid muscle. Incredibly beautiful. Exactly the same colour

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as the yellowing grass. She was stalking wildebeest. She rocked my world.

We followed her for a while (from a distance) hoping to see her spring into action, but she didn't attack anything. Eventually there were five safari vehicles, including us. This seemed really weird, but our driver assured us this was good. This was the worst it ever was for us — most of the time we weren't around any others — but we were lucky. Sammy told us that during high season there can be 50 to 100 vehicles following or surrounding and watching an animal. That must be horrible — especially, of course, for the animals.

After leaving the li-

oness we headed to the lodge. The sky was amazing — clouds with shafts of light passing through that didn't seem real at all — as the sun set. The lodge itself was a pretty nice design — built amidst kopjes, the large rocks that dot the Serengeti sporadically. We could see antelopes grazing from the window that covered one whole wall in our room. It was wonderful. We ate and collapsed into bed. I lay there thinking about seeing the lion. I tried to figure out how I felt about seeing a lioness today. About the fact that I was spending my first night ON the Serengeti. About the fact that I was living out my dreams.

We awoke in the morning at 5:30 a.m. so we could be ready to leave at 6 a.m. We were planning an early morning drive so we could see the sunrise. Unfortunately it was cold and cloudy and the sunrise was minimal — only a few shafts of light were visible amongst the clouds. But this is the best time to see animals, so we drove and drove and drove. Every time we passed another safari vehicle Sammy would stop and converse with them in Swahili. Justin and I would try to listen for familiar words of the various animals. Simba, meaning lion lioness, was obviously the most exciting to me. But noone had seen anything to tip each other off about that morning. It was starting to become an anti-climax. Here we were finally driving around on the Serengeti, but where were the animals?

Eventually we gave up looking for the time being and headed off to what the safari tour guides call "the picnic spot." Here was a wooden picnic table and a wooden shack a little way off, which contained an African toilet. We had brought picnic breakfasts with us and we were about to dine. Evidently the animals know that people are always there and don't come close. I stepped out of the land rover and walked off to the toilet. And suddenly, all at once, it seemed real. It took my feet being on the grass for it to really sink

in. I was on the Serengeti. I, Vique Martin, was really here. Once it had finally sunk in (I'd been there about 14-15 hours by then) I started to feel even better than I had been. I'd felt kind of numb before, but here I was feeling exhilarated and fighting back the tears of happiness.

I stood there and I looked around. There were Justin and Sammy tucking into their food. There was our little safari truck, complete with lift-up roof for us to look out of. There were all the Acacia trees dotting the landscape of the yellowing grass and the large stones. There were the two giraffes in the distance, eating leaves from the trees. And there was me — standing in the middle of the fucking Serengeti and loving every second of it.

After breakfast we resumed our search. Our driver's favourite animal is a leopard, so we were searching for those too. Justin's favourite is the elephant, but we were planning a separate search for those in the afternoon as they hang out in areas with more trees and water. But everyone knew that the aim of this safari was to see lions. I'd traveled thousands of miles and waited a terribly long time for this. The sighting yesterday was amazing. But I wanted more. I dreamed of seeing a whole pride, but I didn't want to be greedy.

We saw some safari vehicles stopped in the distance — a pretty sure sign that there was some action — and we hurried over there. It took a moment or two to see what Sammy was pointing at, but suddenly I saw it. Halfway up a tree, lying on a branch, was a leopard. On another branch, close by, was his breakfast — an impala. Out came the binoculars as we couldn't get too close to the trees as they were set back from the road. But with the magic of modern technology I was 10 times closer and able to examine every inch of the leopard's beautiful coat. How can people kill these things?

After looking at the leopard for a while we headed off again. Sammy



was a great driver and tour guide. Everything was at our pace, and he knew his way around the maze of roads on the Serengeti like the back of his hand. He knew a lot about the animals too. So, we went looking for lions again. And we looked and looked. Eventually we passed another vehicle/driver and he spoke to Sammy, who then turned around and smiled at me. I guess they don't like to get people's hopes up, but Sammy seemed pretty confident now that there were lions ahead, and lots of them.

We saw one up ahead, a lioness, lying on the ground. She looked exhausted, probably having just hunted and eaten. Her face was covered in flies. She was trying to sleep and they were driving her crazy. She was gorgeous. We were about three feet away from her. She was amazing. After a while we drove off and Sammy took a little detour off the road. This is against the law in Tanzania, though in Kenya they supposedly do it all the time. He said that we were doing this very quickly, as he thought the rest of the pride might be in the little forest area directly behind the lioness and adjacent to the road that we were driving along. We drove through, carefully, yet quickly, and saw a lioness jump up and run off. We headed to where she had been and there were two lions. They looked to me like male lions by their size and characteristics, large enough to not be cubs anymore, but their manes had only just started to grow. Teenage lions. They were tearing apart the remains of a zebra leg. There was no mistaking that distinctive fur. They looked up at us and we took a few pictures and drove off. My heart was pounding with excitement at the sight of the lions.

Sammy took us back to the first one we had seen lying in the road. We watched her for a while longer and then he turned around and headed back looking for more. He deviated from the road, saying, "One more look." My heart was in my mouth. I knew that this was probably the highest chance that I was going to have of seeing a pride. I just knew it was going to happen. And then there, before my eyes, they were. They looked up from the grass as we pulled up next to them. There, six to eight feet away from me, was a pride of lions. They were all females, all of them. I stood there and I counted, all the while trembling with excitement. Sammy was hurrying me to take pictures, and I did. I shot five or six photos, all the while trembling. There were 16 lionesses. Sixteen fucking lionesses.

I like lionesses more than lions. I think they are the most magnificent creatures in the universe. And here I was staring at 16 of them. Just sleeping/hanging out in the grass after a breakfast of zebra. This was life



on the Serengeti and I was witnessing it in all its glory.

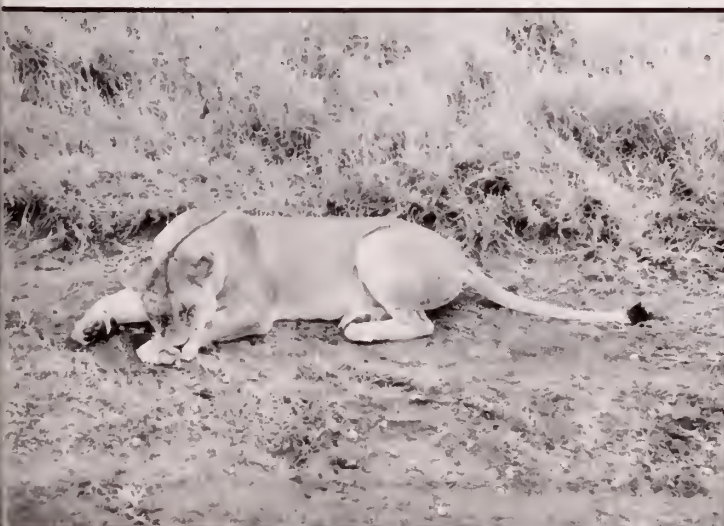
Sammy started up the engine (it's always cut off near animals so as to disturb them as little as possible) and they all looked up again. I took more pictures as we drove off. It was all over so quickly as we had to hurry as we were being very naughty leaving the road. But oh, those seconds; I will savour the memory for the rest of my life.

We headed home soon after that for a power nap and a huge lunch. Feeling somewhat refreshed we headed on our elephant hunt. We drove and drove and saw many, many trees that were broken and bent, providing evidence that elephants had been here. But we couldn't see any. It was disappointing. By now zebra and wildebeest and antelope had become so commonplace to us they didn't cause either of us to express a word, unless an exceptionally small, cute baby one was spotted. Tsetse flies were in abundance in the type of area that elephants like and we had to shut the roof and all the windows and kill any that came in. There were so many of them in the land rover before we realized and they were vicious bastards. They carry a disease called 'sleeping sickness' that is pretty damn nasty, and their bites are supposed to really hurt. They are attracted by large moving objects, like ears, and they like dark blue best. Sammy and I were both wearing navy blue! We managed to kill lots of them, and although Sammy thought he was bitten once and Justin definitely was bitten once, I managed to remain intact. Phew! The mosquitoes and spiders had already munched on me in Mombassa; I didn't deserve any more...

So, whilst there were no elephants to be found all afternoon, we did experience the hippos. There are many pools that the hippopotamus frequent on a regular basis. Hippos rule. We were allowed to get out the safari vehicle and stand on the edge of the pool. They spend all day long in there, as they get too hot on land. There were lots of baby hippos and they were so cute it was unbelievable. But I have to say one negative thing about them. They fucking stink.

They stay in the pool all day long, only coming out at night to eat, and so they shit in there all the time. And as it's pretty dry in this area, with no river leading to or from the pool, the water is stagnant. It stunk. But the view was worth it. About 20 or 30 hippopotami just doing their thing. And, around the sides on the bank, many crocodiles just hung out, waiting for a non-vigilant mother to allow her baby to wander in their path, perhaps. They were pretty menacing and their camouflage was so good. Hippos and crocs; what a sight.

We went back to the hotel in order to watch the sunset from a good vantage point. We sat on the deck and watched the sun sink rapidly over the Serengeti and chatted. Nothing of the day had really sunk in. I tried to write postcards that night, but I didn't really know what to say. I



need to process all of this. My head just spun, but it was a happy spinning, and I loved it.

After breakfast the next day we went on another drive looking for animals. This time we found two male lions, sitting together looking majestic with their manes huge and beautiful. This was a great moment for me too. But I still prefer the lionesses. We headed off to Oludvai Gorge, as we wanted to be there by 3 p.m., as the museum closes then. This is where Mary Leakey found the ape-like skull that is estimated to be nearly two million years old. I had a big evolution/anthropology reading phase when I was 22 and I had always wanted to come here. I stood and looked at the gorge and felt fulfilled.

I quizzed Sammy the next day on how African people felt about fossil remains. I thought it interesting that they were all such religious people, yet all the evidence for evolution theory was right in their home countries. We talked about it for a while and he said that he found it very confusing and kind of believed both in creation theory and in evolution. They don't really seem to see it in the same black and white way that Western culture does. The way that he described it was that he didn't really know, but it wasn't a problem -- the not knowing. That it's kind of a mystery, but that's okay. It didn't make him question science or his faith. I kind of liked the acceptance and the lack of a need for one explanation to be "right."

After the museum, we headed to the second hotel that we were staying in for our last night of the safari. This lodge was right on the edge of the Ngorongoro Crater. The view from the wall of windows in the rooms and restaurant was phenomenal. I'll explain a little. The Crater Highlands consist of an elevated range of volcanoes and collapsed volcanoes (called calderas). The Ngorongoro Crater is one of the world's largest calderas and seems larger because all around it are other volcanoes (most dormant, one not). The crater itself is about 14 miles wide and has a large lake in the middle of it. From the view on the rim you can see dots, which are animals, and a large pink area on the lake -- which is thousands of flamingoes that all flock together during dusk. We spent the night in the hotel, planning very early start to go down into the crater for the day before heading back to Arusha. I was somewhat sad that it was our last night of safari, but thrashing Justin on the huge Alice In Wonderland-like chess set, with the view of the crater ever-present, certainly lifted my spirits.

The next morning we headed down into the crater and the mist was very thick. We couldn't see much from the rim, but as soon as we were at the bottom of the crater it was very clear. When I looked up I saw that the mist almost hovered around the rim, making it seem like this was another world down here inside the crater. It was very strange indeed.

At the entrance there were some young Maasai warriors who offered to let us take their pictures for money. Throughout Africa many people will ask for money if you want to take their picture. I was very uncomfortable with this, and never gave anyone money for photos. It's sometimes hard to know the boundaries between experiencing a culture and documenting a trip, with voyeurism and exploitation. So that was one of

the steps I wasn't really prepared to take.

The Maasai who live in national parks are not allowed by the government to farm. They are allowed to keep cattle and goats, but no crops at all. They are given grains by the government, but for any other things they might need they mainly depend upon tourists giving them money to take their pictures in situations such as these. Justin gave them \$10 to take their pictures. They said I could take them too, for that money, as did Justin, so (with a wavering conscience) I snapped away. The contrast of the red fabric on their dark skin with the misty crater in the background was beautiful.

Onward we went, on a hunt for a rhino and elephants. We searched and searched, and came across a lot of lions from a distance on the way. Finally we found a rhino, but only from a distance. We saw many elephants, but from a distance too. The water buffalo were very impressive here, and most of the animals seemed less afraid of the safari vehicles, so we were able to get just a few feet away from zebra and wildebeest. We found an elephant close by right at the end of the drive. Sammy knew he would be there -- he's always there. He's a really old elephant -- you can tell by how ragged his ears are and how wrinkly his skin is -- but he has both of his tusks. He was awesome.

Leaving the crater was wrenching for me, as it really meant that things were over, but I was brave and not a tear was shed. I enjoyed the long drive home and our last Ethiopian meal in our favourite restaurant. The next day we headed back to Nairobi on the bus. The day after that we headed home. The 26 hour flight (changing in London) home to Los Angeles wasn't long enough to process things. A month wasn't long enough. Only now am I able to get some perspective on the trip.

When I've talked to friends about it I tell them about the Mbege beer with the Chagga people. I tell them about swimming in the Indian Ocean. I tell them lots of things. But I can't say how I felt when I finally stepped on the grass of the Serengeti. I can't put into words the tremendous excitement that made me feel like my chest was going to burst when I saw both that first lion and the pride the following day. There aren't any words to describe fulfillment, to say how it feels to have realised a six year ambition, my only real ambition with regard to travel.

I went to the plains of the Serengeti and saw real lions. I did it. It was my pilgrimage. It was what I had to do for myself, to show myself that if I want something badly enough I can do it. No matter how many miles have to be traveled or oceans crossed -- I can get there. I can. ☺





A HITCHHIKING JOURNEY

ZAGREB TO THE ADRIATIC SEA

by Jane Graham

We begin in Zagreb which is the capital city of Croatia (formerly part of the Republic of Yugoslavia) in one of the university cafeterias, the nearest one to the ATTACK factory where I had spent most of the last six days. If you can manage to borrow a student identity card (known as an "X-card") from a student, you can get the meal, which is already cheap, for pennies. So there were people I'd already met from my time in Zagreb eating there too. It's by far the cheapest place to eat in the city. Okay, so you have to wait in long lines and it's pretty much school dinner fare of a Central European, stodgy variety, especially basic for vegetarians, but it's hot, substantial and very, very cheap.

It was a couple of days after the 20th anniversary of Tito's death, the man who had led the Republic through its period of communism, and who had managed to hold all the different cultures together in reasonably peaceful union. Arbo, my host in Istra, which was to be my next port-of-call, remembers his death clearly. He is the same age as me; I can only think about where I was when John Lennon died. It's not the same.

"I remember, I was in the hospital because I'd just broken my leg. I noticed the nurse on duty, when she came in, she was crying. And she explained she was sad because Mr. Tito was dead, and then all the children on the ward started to cry, too."

It was a hot Sunday afternoon and I was still trying to haul myself out of the city. I'd originally told my friends in Istra I was going to leave the day before. It was halfway through my trip, and, as usual, any sense of organization had pretty much been given up to fate.

Planning had already gotten me this far, through a 27-hour train journey from Denmark and a performance at an arts festival, which is what I'd come for, and all that remained now was for me to explore and enjoy myself.

I was just starting on my pudding when three people — 2 guys and a girl — came over to where I was sitting and joined me, full of greetings. I recognized one of the guys, Sasha, as having performed at the FakiR festival in ATTACK the same night as me. He introduced his companions, Andrej and Andrej's girlfriend, whose name I have rudely forgotten. "We'd been banging on the window," he said, "But you weren't looking over."

ATACK is the name of an autonomous cultural group here in Zagreb. It stands for Autonomne Tvornice Kulture. They organize shows with bands and theatre and arts groups, and had recently moved into a new building, down by the river, called The Factory. I had met the group in March when I'd performed at the student center, before the factory was ready to move into. I'd been there for the renovation party, but this last week had been the first time the space had really been used for events. So I'd performed earlier in the week (planned) and the night before (spontaneous and drunkenly) at this eight-day underground arts festival, FakiR, as had Sasha and Andrej. They are members of a group called Theater Oberju. I remember their piece had been very conceptual and filled with historic and religious symbolism, a direct contrast to my chaotic slapstick and stream of consciousness narrative.

"You're from Zadar, right?" I asked. Zadar is a very old town on the coast of Croatia.

Sasha shook his head. One member of their theatre group was, but Sasha and Andrej were both from an area known as Slavonia, inland in the eastern part of the country.

There'd also been people from other parts of the former Yugoslav republic, including one Serbian theatre group, Theatre of Hats, who I believe were the first Serbian arts group to perform in Croatia since before the war.

The last day of the festival had been yesterday. "What are you still doing here in Zagreb?" asked Sasha.

It was a hot day, the beginning of summer; who wanted to be stuck in the middle of the city in such weather? Maybe the sea wasn't quite warm enough to swim in yet, but it was worth heading west to find out.

"I'm leaving soon," I explained. "I was just eating something first."

"Did you go on the march?" Sasha asked me.

I nodded. The festival had culminated in MMM, Millenium Marijuana March, meeting in the big main square to light up a joint in public and walk to The Factory from there. It was supposed to have been a secret, but it had got leaked to the press and by that afternoon the whole country seemed to know about it. Cannabis is considered in the eyes of the law here to be as dangerous as heroin. There is no distinction between hard and 'soft' drugs, and people have been given long prison sentences for possession of one joint. Coming from Denmark, where cannabis, though illegal, is widespread and reasonably tolerated, I would

never have bothered with such a demo. It would be completely pointless. But here, it was perhaps a first step towards more rational laws. Everyone involved was pretty nervous about what would happen — maybe the police would just arrest everyone smoking — but actually the march was big, happy and peaceful, with no arrests, the pace got slower as people smoked more. I heard, however, that the cops were picking up people as they left the factory site where the march ended, in ones and twos, and searching them. It was an easy tactic because the location of the building, an area of wasteground by the river, meant there were few exits.

"What did you guys do last night?" I asked.

Andrej laughed. "We watched some stupid American movie..."

"About some shopping center," Sasha took up the thread. "It was supposed to be comedy, but..."

"What, *Mallrats*?" I asked. "But that's a great movie..."

I guess the cultural references of Kevin Smith are pretty much lost here in Croatia. That's not to say the people here are lacking in humour, far from it, some of the funniest people I know are from this part of the world. Did I mention that Serbo, Croat is known to be one of the most vulgar languages in the world? The humour's just a lot dryer than it is in the States. And though I'm sure the cultural phenomenon of shopping malls will arrive here soon, thankfully they're still an unusual concept.

"Where are you going to now?" asked Sasha. "Back to England? Or Denmark?"

I shook my head. "Istra," I said.

Istra is a peninsula on the coast of Croatia in the north, close to the Italian border in Trieste. I was planning on visiting friends I'd met earlier, in March, when I'd performed at a social club there. I'd had to leave for Zagreb the next morning then, but Istra had made such an impression on me that I'd promised to return and spend a few more days there, just for a holiday this time.

"I'm hitching to Rijeka, if you want to come with me," said Andrej. "It's quicker than the bus or the train sometimes."

Rijeka was on the way to Istra, close enough. From there, I could catch a bus no problem. I considered it. He was probably right about how long it would take. Croatian trains stop everywhere. Sometimes not even at towns, just at woodpiles with chickens around them.

So, I shrugged, why not?

So far, most of the people I'd met in Croatia were from the coastal areas, or the northern parts, bordering Slovenia, where evidence of the war in the early 1990s wasn't so noticeable. Of course they'd suffered from the economic hardship the same as anyone else, the same loss of dreams and hopes put aside in times of crisis. One of my friends in Istra told me that he and his schoolmates deliberately failed their final year exams the year war broke out because if they didn't graduate they couldn't be enlisted.

But that, although traumatic, was just a general feeling of being at war. That was different from actually being bombed, from spending



I'd forgotten the exhilaration of the unknown which I used to breathe in so deeply as a penniless teenager in a small town in Northern England, when I'd wanted desperately to leave mundanity for a life of adventure, and finally, refusing to be put off by every practical obstacle going, I'd up and run.

months living in an air raid shelter or being driven from your home.

Andrej was from Osijek, a town in the far-eastern corner of Croatia on the Serbian border where bombing had been heavy. Some villages were completely destroyed and people had fled, never to go back. Andrej had left home in his mid teens to live for a time in Holland, Serbia, Germany ... He hadn't seen his mother in years; she was working in Italy, I'm sure he told me, or at least he thought she was. His family had scattered wherever they could find work and a home.

"You know," he said, "my girlfriend's story is so different. She is from Zagreb, and was hardly affected by the war. Of course she went through the psychosis that all countries go through when they are at war, and a couple of air raids, but nothing like my situation."

Andrej had already hitchhiked this route, Zagreb to Rijeka, numerous times this week. It was about 100 miles, not so far perhaps, but cutting through some spectacular mountain scenery. He was studying philosophy in Rijeka but his girlfriend was in Zagreb.

"Why don't you study in Zagreb?" asked the Dutch truck driver who picked us up first.

"I'm working on it," answered Andrej, "but my last girlfriend was from Rijeka, which is why I applied to study there."

Andrej spoke Dutch from his time in Holland, which was good, because this driver's knowledge of either English or Croat didn't seem so good. There were bullet holes in the windscreen, which hadn't managed to puncture it, though they'd left quite a mark. "Bulletproof glass," explained the driver, not without pride, and thrust postcards into our hands of landmines being dismantled. "From Bosnia," he told us, nodding towards the cracked pane.

He seemed pretty sure there was going to be more fighting this summer in Montenegro, a country south of Croatia, and still officially part of Yugoslavia. I'd heard rumours myself of tensions building. Seemed like every year, once the temperature started rising after the winter, so did passions and violence.

He dropped us off in Karlovac. It was about one third of the way. It was in Karlovac, if I'd remembered rightly, that a trial was beginning the following day, a very important trial politically. It was the case of a policeman who, some years previously, had gone into the town and shot dead several people, simply because, he argued, they were Serbs. At the time, though arrested, he'd never stood trial; people seemed to justify his crime. Serb hatred and nationalistic feeling were still strong, and, they defended him, "He'd been fucked up by the war." Now, with the change of government which had occurred earlier in the year, the new party was slightly more progressive, less corrupt, the case was being opened again. The judge's job was not easy — to seek justice, without inciting riots. This case was not an isolated one, but just one example from hundreds of others in recent times. A lynch mob mentality still existed among certain elements of Croatian society.

In our spot in the outskirts of this town, which on a late Sunday afternoon looked much like any other small town anywhere in Europe, some hitchhikers already waited. They were probably only going to the next village, Andrej said. In Croatia, it's quite normal to hitchhike short distances. While we waited, we talked.

"With hitchhiking, anything can happen," he said. It's true. I'd forgotten the exhilaration of the unknown that I used to breathe in so deeply as a penniless teenager in a small town in Northern England, when I'd wanted desperately to leave mundanity for a life of adventure, and finally, refusing to be put off by every practical obstacle going, I'd up and run. With only the price of a large bottle of cider and a bag of chips, I'd head to punks' picnics and free festivals, taking on drivers who saw unwashed clothes and shapeless sweaters as an open sexual invitation. Or I'd meet people on the road, like Jo, with whom I spent a long sleepless night in Edinburgh, a few hours of true desperation and intimacy, never to see her again.

But then England (or even Britain) is a very small country and it's difficult to get stranded. The only time I found myself stuck a long way



from home, I got scared by the small town I'd found myself in, when nightfall came down and the provincial freaks started appearing. I telephoned my mother knowing I had relatives not so far away. She uncovered some living even closer, wealthy ones I hadn't seen since I was very small, who came to rescue me. From a reasonably cute toddler I had grown into a dreadlocked, smelly 20-something student. But my distant cousin or aunt or whatever she was told me with an air of anthropological pride they'd had a student from Iran staying in the guest room quite recently, where I would be, without really explaining why or how, just that her husband had discovered him somewhere. They obviously found strays quite interesting.

Yes, it'd been a while since I'd been on the open road waiting in the late afternoon, watching everyone drive by, giving myself up to fate.

"Getting stranded in the mountains isn't fun though," Andrej had told me earlier in the afternoon, while we were walking through the main square of Zagreb. "It gets very cold in the night." The biggest and most spectacular mountains in Croatia are in the south close to the coast. "There's always the burnt-out, empty houses abandoned by Serbs to stay in though."

"Yeah," Sasha had taken up the story, "but that time we decided to

SOME BACKGROUND

Croatia is a (relatively small) country between Italy and Serbia, bordered by the Adriatic Sea on the west, Slovenia to the north and Bosnia and Serbia to the east. Its religion is predominantly catholic. It was previously part of the communist republic of Yugoslavia which began to disband in 1990, under the leadership of Tito, and often seen as the more 'open' face of communism by those in the west. Before communism, Croatia was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire and previous to that some areas in the north west, around the coast, (including Rijeka and Istra) were under Italian rule. Long before, it was also under the domination of the Turkish (Ottoman) empire. Because of its geographical location, on the frontier of east and west, influenced by both middle Europe, the Mediterranean and Turkish (eastern) influence, Croatia has had a long history of conflicts and changing rulers.

When Tito died in 1980 the uneasy relationship between all the Yugoslavian states, with their different cultures and religions, began to show cracks. At the end of the 1980s the eastern bloc of communist countries started falling one by one, and in 1991 Croatia voted for independence and became independent. Conflicts with Serbia began in the same year, mainly in the north-eastern province of Slavonia. Although the conflict in other ex-Yugoslavian countries still is continuing (mainly in Kosovo and Montenegro), the war between Serbia and Croatia ended in 1995.

People in Croatia speak the Serbo-Croat language, which, as it has Slavic roots, is related to Czech, and has an English (Latin) alphabet.

talk to him and then motioned me to come over. He was offering us a lift. Unsure but trusting of my more experienced companion, I got in. The cop wasn't in uniform, but actually had on army fatigues. He spoke very little, and quietly to Andrej in Croat. I sat silent in the back, after the initial, "bocak," in greeting, one of the handful of Croat words I'd managed to pick up.

Another change the new government made, as I understood it, was a major shake-up of the police force to make it more answerable to the people. Before, I was told, there were cops everywhere you went; now their numbers were fewer. Nobody I met seemed to think the new party

sleep in one of the abandoned houses we ended up leaving in the middle of the night, we couldn't sleep. We were sure it was still haunted by the people who'd lived there before."

I imagined it, the creepiness, the phantoms of history too recent to let go, haunted by memories of angry, vengeful Serb ghosts driven out of their home.

Andrej had lived in Serbia for a while. Just like he said hitchhiking was about limitless possibilities, so he described the city of Belgrade. "In Serbia," he explained, "anything is possible because everything is based on improvisation. In a way it's quite exciting. It's just you can't live like that for a long period of time. There comes a point at which you need some kind of stability."

The second lift was from a young Austrian. He wasn't going far, but Andrej wanted to get out from the awkward spot we'd gotten ourselves stuck in, plus he couldn't resist the offer of a lift in a fancy open top sports car and a fast drive.

We seemed to be waiting at the foothills of the mountainous area well into early evening, a slight anxiety of being abandoned taking shape in me, when a police car pulled up. I thought we'd get moved on; I wasn't sure what the laws on hitchhiking were in Croatia, even though everybody did it. At any rate people had told me enough bad stories about corrupt cops in this country, how they were in league with the Nazis and couldn't be trusted. Andrej went to

was perfect, by any means, but slowly, small steps appeared to be taking place.

The lift took us virtually all the way, about an hour and a half's drive. The cop smoked and I tried to keep awake in the back, lulled by the car's smooth suspension, trying to keep it focused in my mind as I got too settled that I was actually sitting in the back of a police car in a foreign country.

At some point on the journey there was a toll booth and all the vehicles had to slow down. But when the toll collector in the booth saw the markings of a police car she waved us through without payment. Both Andrej and I couldn't quite resist a smile. The cop told Andrej he never had to pay tolls.

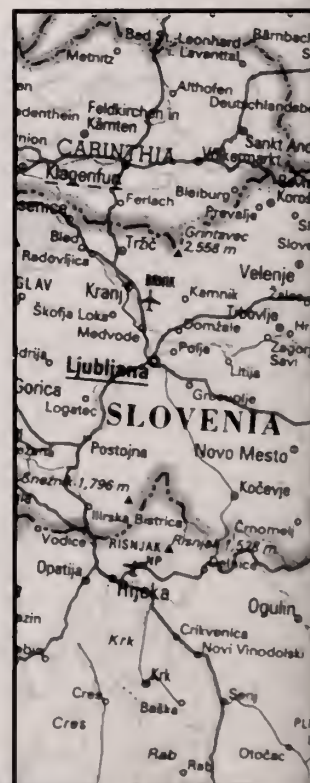
Convinced and relaxed that this last ride would take us all the way to Rijeka, I was a little confused when the cop suddenly stopped the car at a steep incline as the road twisted around to meet the coast. Andrej and I got out. I looked at the view in front of us. The sun was just going down and the Adriatic sea was lying sparkling below me over the sheer drop. Lights were starting to twinkle across the bay. It was a terrible place to be left to be picked up – in the middle of a bad road junction as it turned to night and grew cold and very dark. But it had to be the best view I had ever experienced whilst hitchhiking, or could have hoped to have seen.

We did get a lift, though, from two strange, old Italian tourists on their way to Trieste who seemed disinterested in making conversation and listened to traditional Bosnian gypsy music. From the outskirts of Rijeka we took the bus into the centre. We hadn't been picked up by a single Croatian, with the exception of the policeman. Strange. But that's hitchhiking, like Andrej had pointed out. Anything can happen. You can't assume the obvious. People told me to be careful of the police, that they were some of the worse in Europe, and then something like that comes along to challenge my expectations.

It was about nine in the evening when we arrived at the bus station. I wasn't sure if there would be a bus that late. I'd expected us to arrive earlier. "I'll go and see," said Andrej. "And if there isn't, we'll have to improvise."

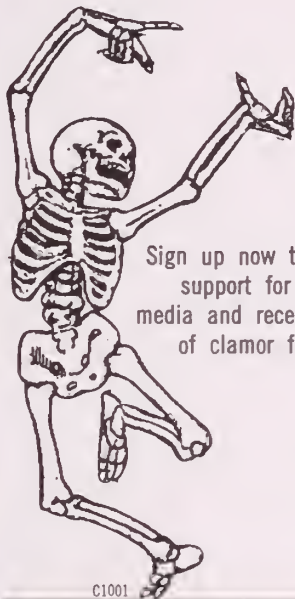
Somehow, I didn't feel nervous. I had placed my trust, as I do on these kind of journeys, in fate and in a travel companion, usually someone I had known only for a short period of my journey. Andrej came back having located the correct bus to finish my journey to my destination, Pazin, which was smack in the centre of the Istran peninsula. I was returning to a town surrounded by some of the most beautiful scenery I had ever seen. It was well worth the hitchhike to get there. But that was where Andrej and I parted. I'd got to know him only through that journey, but he made a great hiking companion. Perhaps we might meet up again on another trip. In Pazin I fell in river gorges, picked wild cherries and spent nights listening to frogs and looking at stars, but all that's a whole other story.

"Yes, the world can be a terrible place," Andrej had said to me to earlier that day, as he was mulling over the legacy the war had left on his people. A stark fact, uttered bluntly, yet not dwelled upon, not said to elicit pity. Yet Croatia, both the people and the environment have shown me also that it can be full of laughter and beauty as well. ☺



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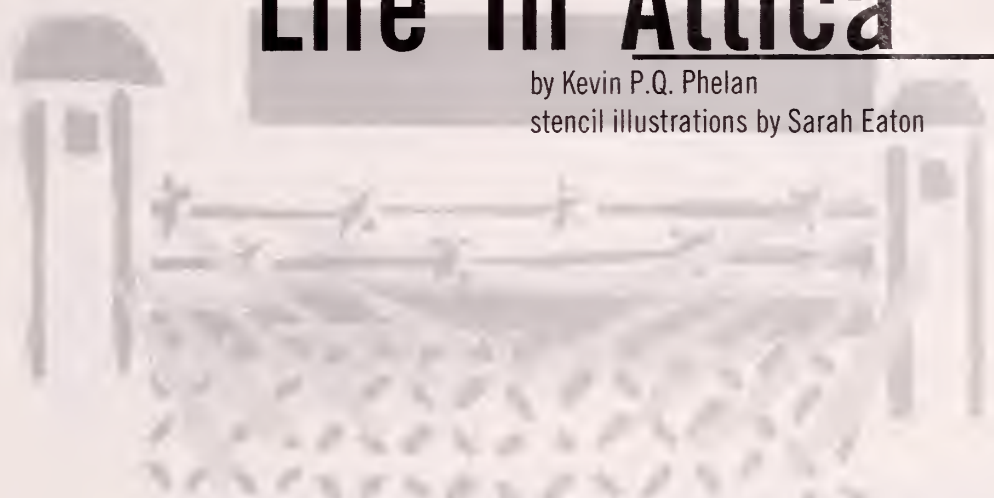
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Life In Attica

by Kevin P.Q. Phelan
stencil illustrations by Sarah Eaton



There are 57 maximum, medium and minimum security prisons scattered throughout the state of New York, with almost every zip and area code housing at least a fraction of the nearly 80,000 inmates.

It's not surprising then, that individual prisons disappear in this ubiquity. One might mistake Cocksackie and Shawangunk for words from a forgotten native vocabulary, or confuse Great Meadow and Riverview for retirement homes, Bare Hill and Hale Creek for wealthy summer retreats.

Not so for Attica, New York's most maximum security facility. It long ago ceased referring to the village for which it was named in all but the minds of the villagers, a word that leaves no uncertainty.

Attica. Three syllables that curl into a fist. One of the only prisons in the country known by name.



To get there, you must take the highway, and as soon as you head south off Interstate 90 at Exit 48 near the upstate city of Batavia, you are in God's country. Under a huge sky blue sky, sweeping vistas of verdant hills billow across the terrain. There are more weeping willows than a Billie Holiday song, a delirium of Queen Anne's Lace by the side of the road. It takes forever to pass the omnipresent dairy farms while small communities begin and end in the blink of an eye.

Suddenly there appears a Food Jubilee, Rite Aid, Burger King, and Sugar Creek Food/Gas Mart – the work of human hands. These commercial clumps occur at easily measured intervals throughout the United States, as if earth movers steamrolled across the country dropping clusters of homogenous corporate outposts like excrement.

You could be anyplace in America, but a sign says Attica.

If you don't turn left at the railroad overpass, onto Main Street, you would miss Attica completely. Jim's Grocery and Hans Mueller's Jewelry Shop begin what locals refer to without irony as 'downtown,' and the two lane road continues past a car dealership, a video store, a bank, a post office, and a variety of churches. A little further still is a series of elegant Victorian-style homes with porches double the size of many Manhattan studios, then the High School, a historical society, and Steven's Memorial Public Library. All of the necessities of existence – commercial, spiritual, social, video, automotive – all in little more than a mile. And the moment it ends, broad expanses of brown and green checkered farms begin anew.

Intersecting the mid-point of Main is Exchange Street and downtown's only traffic light. Waiting for the light to change, the allure of small town life is seductive. A coed group of teenagers bicycles slowly past a mother pushing a stroller, all of them exchanging earnest hellos.

An elderly couple holds hands while crossing the street. It seems simple and serene, as far from the violent clang and frantic clutter of the city as you could get, a lazy lull of life filled with Lion's Club meetings and Little League games, driveway signs announcing sweet corn stands and strawberry socials, pigtailed girls selling lemonade by the side of the road.

Continuing on Exchange St., past the swimming pool, baseball diamond, and basketball courts at Attica Memorial Park, past the grounds of the Attica Rodeo, past the mute dead of St. Vincent's cemetery, the idyllic backdrop suddenly evaporates. In one swift, paradise-shattering visual blow, there looms a 30 foot high, mile-and-a-quarter monster of a gray wall. It was such simple and frank architecture, demonstrating a blunt disregard for its surroundings, actually becoming the surroundings, infiltrating and overwhelming the eye. With an unsubtle, unadorned rhetoric, it not only argued but achieved the bureaucrat's aesthetic: Everyone inside a number. Every form subject to function.

Topped by miles of razor wire.

At once you are reminded of another God who dwells in this same countryside, the Old Testament fellow, the one filled with wrath, the dispenser of vengeance.

Outside The Prison

Short of purchasing a \$60,000 dollar home, renting a \$385 two bedroom apartment, or committing a string of armed robberies, the Attican hotel is the only place for visitors to stay. Perched atop a small hill overlooking the dull corporate nexus of Rite-Aid, Burger King and Food Jubilee, it is run by the Vangs, one of Attica's few minority families. Most weekends, it fills up to capacity with visitors to the prison, while during the week, it is virtually deserted.

Al Lippold lives a short walk away on Buffalo Street in a home built by his father seven decades ago. A good natured 77-year-old, whose broad shoulders and neatly trimmed crew cut betrays an earlier military training, Al was born in the house next door. The prison was also built during his childhood, and Al recalls going with his father after Sunday church to watch the WPA workers and prison laborers tattoo the field with the now-signature wall. "You don't find quality work like that anymore," he said.

He had no way of knowing then that he would occupy these two buildings for most of his life. "When I was a kid, right after high school, I said I'd never work at that prison," he declared with a chuckle. But in 1951, after an Air Force stint followed by a series of transient railroad jobs throughout the United States, he became homesick, returned to

and with few options available, took the prison guard exam. He never left, retiring from the Department of Corrections in 1985 after 32 years of service, 29 at Attica. "It treated me pretty good," he said of the prison. "I have no complaints."

A sentiment that goes for a life lived in the village as well. The schools were top notch, the neighbors friendly, doors never needed to be locked. A faint wisp of nostalgia floats into his reveries, though, for the days when Main Street was filled with family owned grocers, meat shops, bakeries, and pharmacies, services since monopolized by the Food Jubilee and RiteAid up the road. We spoke as he packed for a trip to visit his son in Chicago, which underscored his main lament about Attica, a sentiment familiar to most Upstaters: "There's nothing to hold a kid here."

Tack-sharp, 34-year-old Bill Hardie, though, has been held firm by Hans Mueller's Jewelry Shop. As a teenager, he mowed Hans' lawn, and later attended the Bulova watchmaking school in Woodside, Queens at the older man's urging. There was never any doubt that he would return to run the shop after his training. "A lot of people come back here to raise their family," he said, letting the thought hang in the air while he attended to a customer. He inquired about the woman's newborn son, and convinced her that she didn't need his paid help to fix her watch. He showed her what to do, and when she left, he said, "I mean, this is Mayberry."

An aura, he admits, that is deflated by the prison. "It's awful to have that hover over us," he said, and it must hover more ominously over him than most. His father was one of the guards killed in 1971 when the word Attica entered the nation's lexicon, spilling off of a million tongues. He shied away from the deeply personal topic, and instead offered the by now familiar economic logic of prison communities - the jobs, the constant flow of state money, the trickle down benefits for local businesses. "It's what keeps us alive."

The same pluses and minuses of life in Attica arose so often it seemed as if it were scripted. Good schools, friendly neighbors, a great place to raise kids. The prison is an unfortunate presence that pays the village's bills. The librarian said as much, as did the police chief, the family judge and the waitress at the Attica Hotel. The lack of major retail outlets like the Gap and WalMart topped their catalogue of inconveniences, but it was universally held, more out of hope than conviction, that Attica is "just like anyplace else."

Every day at noon, or in cases of fire or prison breakouts, the siren atop the police station shrieks for a full minute.

Teenagers have no brand name for their lack, and instead have many piercings and tattoos. They have left not one, but two post-Columbine threats at the high school. They dream of leaving.

Just like anyplace else.

"When you hit 15 or 16, there's only sports and partying," said 18-year-old Mike Hiker as he waited tables at the Signature Café, a sort of 1950's malt shop/Starbuck's crossbreed on Main Street. The cash counter was covered with fliers for upcoming local events and on the far wall, a handwritten sign beneath a display of baby pictures asked, "Can you guess who these people are? They're all active members of the community." One gets the feeling that many could guess correctly, or at the very least, have loads of fun trying. Gregarious and multi-pierced, Mike can only think of a handful of classmates who plan to stay after high school graduation. He himself had just returned from his first trip to New York City, which bolstered his decision to leave. "When you go to New York, you realize how there's nothing here."

Before going to sleep, I stood outside my room at the Attican and watched three teenagers skate shaky geometries in the Food Jubilee parking lot. Under a sky teeming with stars, they seemed to manifest the slow, carefree pace of small town existence, a serene, gliding movement within well-defined boundaries.

After a while, the trio left, slipping silently into the enveloping dark. I went inside to watch television. An alligator snapped its heavy jaws in an Everglades swamp. A man spoke convincingly from behind a podium. Tide gets tough stains out. India's population will surpass one

billion in the fall. In this narcotic glow, I was no longer Anyplace Else but Everyplace At Once. The swirling waves of radiation flowed through my body and the villagers' bodies and the prisoners' bodies and soon the one billionth Indian's body, a blanketing atmosphere of staticky signals, an unreadable Morse, an electromagnetic web spun by a galaxy of orbiting satellites. We are all connected.

Just after midnight, the siren wailed, and there was little indication as to whether it advertised noon, fire or escape.



When Attica was incorporated in 1837, the village already had one newspaper and four daily trains to New York City. A census at the time counted 2,485 residents, a number that has remained remarkably steady over the years, with the 1994 tally coming in at 2,658. As an indication of the area's steep dairy culture, cows have always outnumbered humans in the county. By 1900, six weekly newspapers competed for attention and nearly 10 train companies had daily service to and from Attica.

The tenor and pace of life loitered like this for decades, a quaint village ringed by farms and farmers, connected by rail to the world at large.

In 1926 a rent would occur as New York State fretted over its burgeoning prison population. Even with cocaine available by prescription, the system was struggling to accommodate 7,351 prisoners. That's men and women. (For comparison, in 1998, 9,063 people were sentenced to state prison for drug offenses alone.)

To help address the issue, Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt laid out plans for what he hoped would be the most modern prison in the nation somewhere between Buffalo and Batavia. The town of Warsaw declined the State's initial offer because, as Al Lippold said, "Nobody wanted a prison in those days." The Attica Chamber of Commerce and Merchant's Society, though, saw opportunity where their neighbors saw burden, and lobbied hard to bring the project to the village. According to a history prepared for Attica's 1987 Sesquicentennial celebration, the business community felt that luring the prison "would mean new prosperity for a declining village."

In a stroke of coincidence, ground breaking ceremonies took place on Tuesday, October 15, 1929, two weeks to the day before the Great Depression unfolded across the nation. Attica survived that era unscathed, and actually thrived, providing an early example of how prisons can protect communities from economic ruin. Even when the Westinghouse plant closed during the recessions of the 70s and 80s, which ravaged most of Upstate New York, the lost jobs and revenue hurt the village's sense of pride more than its bottom line.

So while the trains no longer stop here, the prison dollars do: more than 44 million of them in fiscal year '97-'98, which is why its not surprising that towns and villages competed fiercely when Mario Cuomo oversaw the state's most recent prison construction boom.

But people should be careful what they wish for, because in 1987 the village received a second prison, the Wyoming County Medium Security facility. Built tumor-like directly behind the maximum security prison, it seems as if the original had simply metastasized across the landscape. Now, there is an effective 2:1 ratio of prisoners to residents.

There's another rub. With its economic health dependent on urban transgressors, it was inevitable that the urban press would follow close behind. And since the infamous events of 1971, they have arrived in droves, erasing any possibility for the village to remain secluded and anonymous like its Maximum Security cousins in Sullivan, Clinton, or Elmira.

In the villagers' minds, the big city media swept into Attica during the riot, and returns each year on its anniversary, only looking for what they want to see. "When something bad happens at the prison," said one resident, "reporters come in and find the most ignorant person who says 'Attica sucks.' And they go ahead and just print that." The way they tell

it, educated, urban writers use the village as a whipping post in order to feel — well, in order to feel educated and urban. And after the recent hoopla surrounding the State's recent \$8 million settlement with former prisoners, there's no danger of their opinion softening any time soon.

THE WALL

As much as they try to downplay the prison's impact on the collective consciousness of the village, it obviously occupies a central role. Many conversations veer quickly to the topic, leaning heliotropically to 1971, the sun of the village's history.

What happened then depends on whose telling the story, and there are two distinct versions. In the one titled 'Riot', arrogant, inhuman prisoners further demonstrated their arrogant inhumanity with an unjustifiable eruption of brutishness. Benign authorities were cornered and had no choice but to take the prison by force. Merely switch 'prisoners' and 'authorities', and you have the version titled 'Uprising.' The renderings are entrenched, immutable, and only agree on the number of dead. Needless to say, each oversimplifies a complex chapter in not only New York but United States penal history, one that began long before September 11, 1971 and, in some regards, has yet to end.

Thirty years later and Al Lippold's second wife is still bitter over the 15 color TVs the inmates received in the tumult's wake. "My parents worked hard, and they still had black and white." Al described the miserly budgets and utter lack of concern from state authorities in Albany over the explosive situation at Attica. "But after the riot, money! My God there was no end to the money!" With a budget approaching \$2 billion dollars a year, the DOC spigot seems to have been left open ever since.

Mildred Molinari, a sweet, gentle 75-year-old, worked as a receptionist the day these events unfolded. After she was whisked to safety, she clearly remembers first praying and then mourning for Billy Quinn, the young guard beaten to death by inmates in the first minutes of the mayhem. His funeral procession passed by her front door. When she reached the point of the story when the National Guard took the prison back by force, I asked if Atticans were upset with the violent tactics used. "Of course," she said. "We never thought the *prisoners* would act like that."

But a lot of lives are shaped by more personal events and less dramatic architectures. The middle-age cashier at Jim's Grocery has memorized the product codes for all of the items in the store. She buried her first husband the day after their first child was born, and several years later, she and her second husband lost his teenage son in a fatal car accident. The only time she gives the prison a thought, glancing at that, is when Wyoming County inmates weed the flower beds at the patch of park abutting the fetid Tonawanda Creek.

I know I'm part of the problem. Ever since arriving, I can't get enough of the prison. I drive by quickly, then turn around and drive by slowly. I park in front of it, to the side, I try to circle it on foot, hoping to observe it from every possible angle, in a variety of light.

So it may just be me, then, or outsiders in general, who obsess about the prison, a realization that does not prevent me from continuing to stare. I gawk. I look at it out of the corner of my eye. I squint. I turn my back to it, stand in its shadow. I make appointments, as if it were one of the interviews I've arranged. I even bring my lunch.

As I finished one scheduled visit - at dusk by foot - I met Aereal, an



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18-year-old woman walking home from her shift at the Food Jubilee. Cars gently dopplered by as she discussed her plans to make enough money to get her own apartment and buy a used car. "Once I get a car," she said, "it's all good." Her house is one of the dozen or so that sit directly opposite the prison wall. I asked her what she thought of the sight.

"It's pretty cool," she said quickly. She gazed at the wall with what can only be described as admiration, and after a moment of silent contemplation added, "It looks like a giant mansion or a castle."

I returned to the prison at midnight, to experience it under a waxing moon. The car rolled to a stop at the Tipperary Bar and Grill, a tavern across the street from the jail's main entrance. Waves of conversation and laughter pulsed from inside.

I started to stare. The place seemed deserted, as if it had been abandoned hastily. A score of cars formed a tight cluster in the center of the sprawling parking lot while a symphony of cicadas purred in the background.

For a moment, the picture blurred slightly, softened. It's hard to explain, but it seemed as though if it weren't for the massive windowless wall, the gun towers, the ominously pacing cinematic spotlights, and the slight tremor of vast human suffering, I'd swear I was standing in front of the Food Jubilee.

Inside The Prison

All of those who live or work within the wall, have perfected the conceit of appearing to ignore others while examining them carefully. There is no eye contact exchanged, yet everyone gleans detailed mental notes in passing. Granite faced, emotionless guards wrote my name in a log book, searched my belt and shoes, rummaged through my pockets, all without once looking up. Still they formulated complex opinions, assessed my character, knew where I would be at all times. I passed through a metal detector, had my hand stamped with an ink only visible under ultraviolet light.

The prisoners walk through the corridors with heads bowed, in single file silence, striking inconspicuous postures. But when I met with Corey Arthur, he gave a precise report of my whereabouts and dress the previous day during a press tour of the facilities, down to the exact minute and

tic term. "Matter of fact," he added, "I know certain guys are calling you a fucking little bitch."

The grounds immediately inside the wall seem downright collegiate. A well-manicured lawn emits the aroma of just-cut grass, and thin ribbons of sidewalk connect stately brick buildings.

Jeff Schiffer, a 42 year old counselor who has worked at Attica for a decade, pointed to a trailer park complex down one path, the site of an enhanced visitation program that allows eligible inmates and their families to spend up to 46 hours together. The most famous coupling occurs when Mark David Chapman's wife arrives, a woman Jeff swears is a dead ringer for Yoko Ono. He pointed down another path to a tenement-esque Segregation Housing Unit, which holds up to 106 inmates in lock down for 23 hours a day. The regimen is reserved for disciplinary problems or those whose safety would be threatened in the general population. It is how John Lennon's assassin whittles away the rest of his time.

Straight ahead in the Administration building, more guidance counselors, teachers and a variety of administrative staff moved through the halls in a buzz of office activity. Spiritual services run the gamut of world religions, and I met in short order an imam, a rabbi, and a nun. Sister Rosalyn, who was in a rush to start the final installment of a three day retreat.

Up to this point, Attica was a far cry from the grim cliché of long, dank corridors steeped in a dim chthonian glow, shackled shadows of slow moving men, echoing screams, cracked clay walls scrawled with desperate graffiti.

The visiting room further collapsed the stereotype. A father and son played cards on one metal bench, couples hugged and kissed on others, children ran in circles, were instructed to settle down. A row of vending machines dispensed soda, candy, flavored coffee and White Castle hamburgers. Not a handcuff in sight, no Plexiglas dividers, no hushed, secretive tones, only the sort of giddy excitement tempered by casual boredom that one finds at a Greyhound bus terminal.

Administrator John Roach described the various programs offered to inmates. For work, they serve meals, cut the grass, clean the windows, or sweep and mop the floors for thirty hours a week at an average taxed wage of 60 cents a day. A select group of about 120 work in Corcraft, a sheet metal fabrication program that produces lockers, desks, file cabinets, garbage cans, and sign posts. No, no license plates. These positions have a somewhat higher pay scale and forty hour work weeks. "But work programs are mostly custodial in nature."

Education is also provided. For those with serious needs, there are GED and pre-GED courses. He picked up a sheaf of test results, and read off the grade levels. "5.4, 4.6, 3.9." He paused, holding up a sheet of paper. "Here's one that didn't even register." Attica, he said, is the last prison in the state system that offers courses in higher education, quickly adding that a consortium of nearby private colleges administers and funds them. He labored on the point, anxious and worried that it might wind up in print that convicted murderers and drug dealers received college degrees on the taxpayer's tab.

The virtual non-existence of substance abuse programs does not worry him much. "Why offer drug programs to an inmate in the first year of a 25 year sentence?" he asked, and for him the answer was obvious.

The jail proper begins after the Administration building. Imagine a square. Now place a cross in the center of the square so four smaller squares of equal size are formed. Carved into the outer square are hives of 6 x 8 foot cells, the mess hall, the infirmary and work sites. This is the world inhabited by the 2,000 plus inmates. The four inner courtyards are used for outdoor activity. The cross, which resembles an X, is a series of corridors linking all sides of the larger outer square.

Before we entered the X, Jeff pointed to a wall display of confiscated weapons: shanks fashioned out of broken pieces of plastic, scraps

of metal, points whittled into blocks of wood.

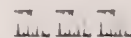
Inside the X, hundreds of small windows bathed the clean, wide hallway in mocking streams of sunlight. An inmate mopped the floor. Out in the yards, there were full court basketball games in progress, a stereotypical amount of weightlifting, pockets of men doing what looked like nothing. Guards peered down from the gun towers. Jeff insisted that most days were uneventful, even though a warning shot was fired during an inmate-inmate scuffle the week before. Back inside, groups of 40 prisoners, their faces gnawed by time, walked by in single file silence.

We proceeded to the center of the X, first named Times Square by the mostly New York City guards who manned the prison when it opened in the '30s. A guard enveloped in a Plexiglas cocoon controlled the gates separating all four corridors. Jeff pointed out tiny apertures at the cocoon's base, and explained how missiles could be fired in case of (what he referred to as) a disturbance. So far, the weapon has never been used.

Even though we were walking in a straight line, a strange disorientation and claustrophobia descended after we passed through Times Square. I could no longer imagine an aerial view of the X. Guards and inmates passed in an orderly fashion, seeming to have settled into a bored bureaucratic rhythm of motion. Men started and stopped according to regulation, spoke only when spoken to. But beneath this surface calm, there seethed a hidden, percolating tension, a taut, inarticulate pressure.

"Time for a massage," one guard joked as he prepared to frisk an inmate who obligingly spread eagled against the wall. Both men knew what would happen if the request was denied. In fact, in each routine movement, each gesture, there rested an implication of violence, both the memory of the savage acts that the prisoners had committed as well as the massive, omnipotent state power that backed up each guard. The X seemed to nourish this brutal culture of inmates routinely hurling feces and urine at guards, night sticks dangling from hips, of shanks concealed up shirt sleeves, in body orifices, patiently awaiting the moment to pierce exposed flesh.

When we walked outside again, I sucked fresh air in greedy gulps. The rabbi waved to me from the second floor of the Special Housing Unit. Confused, I waved back. Church hymns floated through the air, desperate, off-key voices singing of a hoped for redemption at Sister Rosalyn's retreat. A world beyond the X slowly reappeared as I gathered my belongings and beat a hasty retreat.



As I waited the next day to speak with 22-year-old Corey Arthur, I reflected on the horrific details of the crime for which he was convicted: the duct tape across Jonathan Levin's mouth, the three knife wounds across his throat, the bullet lodged in his skull, the disturbing betrayal of trust for a four digit ATM code.

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The work of human hands.

"For someone from New York, this place is hell," he said when he arrived dressed in forest green sweatshirt

and sweatpants. We spoke in a private room off to the side of the visiting area, reserved for families to take photographs. One wall was splashed with a colorful medley of smiling cartoon characters - Donald, Mickey, Minnie, Goofy, and Daffy on some sort of menacing parade - while another contained, from ceiling to floor, a scenic snapshot of a snow-capped mountain and lake. Tacked to the third wall was a list of rules inmates must follow while in the photo room. "They say it's the worst penitentiary in the state, and in many regards it is," he said. "It has that aura of a medieval dungeon."

His freedom ended before he turned 19, and has no chance of resuming until his first shot at parole in 2023, when he's 45. Based on the

nature of the crime and the standing of the victim, even then the chances are slim. He did not want to discuss the case beyond declaring his complete innocence, going so far as saying that even being *accused* of the crime was like being accused of killing his mother. But his fingerprints were all over the scene, his voice on the answering machine, Jonathan Levin's blood stained on his clothes.

The jury was not convinced he fired the fatal shot, though, which spared him the death penalty, and his accused accomplice was even acquitted, so doubts about unequivocal guilt remain. "As soon as I realized the police implicated me in this, I knew I was gonna go down, cause no fucking way in the world they gonna give me a fair shot. It's just not the thing you expect growing up in here." He caught his slip. "I mean not in here, but growing up where I come from."

As a teen, he was well versed in incarceration. A shock program at 16 followed by a one to three year stint at Collins for drug possession, and before settling at Attica on February 6, 1999, he had been shuffled in and out of Auburn, Downstate and Glenview. He had heard the word Attica often during his childhood in Bed-Stuy and East New York, as it was the word used to explain the mysterious disappearance of older men from the neighborhood. "You like, 'Where's such and such?' 'Oh, he in Attica.'"

His definition has since expanded to include a description worthy of Poe. "A lot of bells. A lot of bells. A lot of yelling." He paused for a moment. "Bells, yelling, things open, a lot of slamming, clicking shut, clicking open, keys jingling, a lot of yelling." He took a breath. "In this jail particularly, a whole lot of people running. An alarm ring off, every officer is supposed to respond."

In his short life, he has witnessed how prison can cause a figurative death long before the literal one. "This is a place where you can mentally die, unless you make an effort, you mentally die in this place. And once you mentally die, the physical part is right after. You ever just saw somebody that lost all hope in life? You look at them and you see that's just a shell of a man right there. That's all there is. All he knows is when that bell ring, stand up or to say you want chow. That's all he knows. He's become programmed. That bell ring, that's all he knows. How to move through the hallways, and that's it. Anything beside the expectations of the warden, he don't know nothing about. He don't care about hygiene, he don't care about nothing. That's just how they go."

To maintain a semblance of focus, he works 40 hours a week in the fabrication division of the metal shop earning 26 cents an hour, a wage that can climb to 45 cents, not including bonuses. "You like on one part I'm doing better than anyone else in the jail as far as job wise, but on the other hand you like 'Damn, I'm doing all this fuckin work and I'm only getting 26 cents an hour?'" He hopes to save a dollar from each paycheck in order to buy a radio from the commissary for \$14, a process that will take at least seven months. "Somebody may look at me and say, 'You crazy? Seven months?' But I got 25 years."

He asked me to get him a cup of coffee because inmates aren't allowed to use the vending machines. When I returned, our conversation continued, but I wasn't listening. I passed the next several minutes staring at the steaming cup of Hazelnut coffee, imagining the scalding water thrown across my face.

When I played the tape back later, he was discussing just this sort of implicit violence incubated by prison. "If the guards did what they were required to do and the inmates do what they're required by the criteria, it

would work. On paper it works. But because you have human beings and everyone's an individual, it don't work. But on paper it works."

Physical attacks between inmates are most prevalent, while the guards' power manifests itself mentally in the capricious denial of privileges like showers, time in the yard, meals at the mess hall, the library at night. "You fuck up, they dead you on everything," he said, with no explanation. "Imagine you sitting in your cell and you put down for chow. Days you don't know why your cell don't open, it just fucks

with you. If it makes sense to you, you still get mad but you can understand your anger. But when you can't understand your aggression, that shit drives you crazy."

As he sipped his coffee, he described the futility of striking back. "You can't win. A physical fight, you're not gonna win. You may knock out the first one or two, but you forget there's more coming. There's more! They'll call people from other jails. They're gonna come, and you'll lose eventually. So they do anything they want. That's what it all breaks down to. They do anything they want."

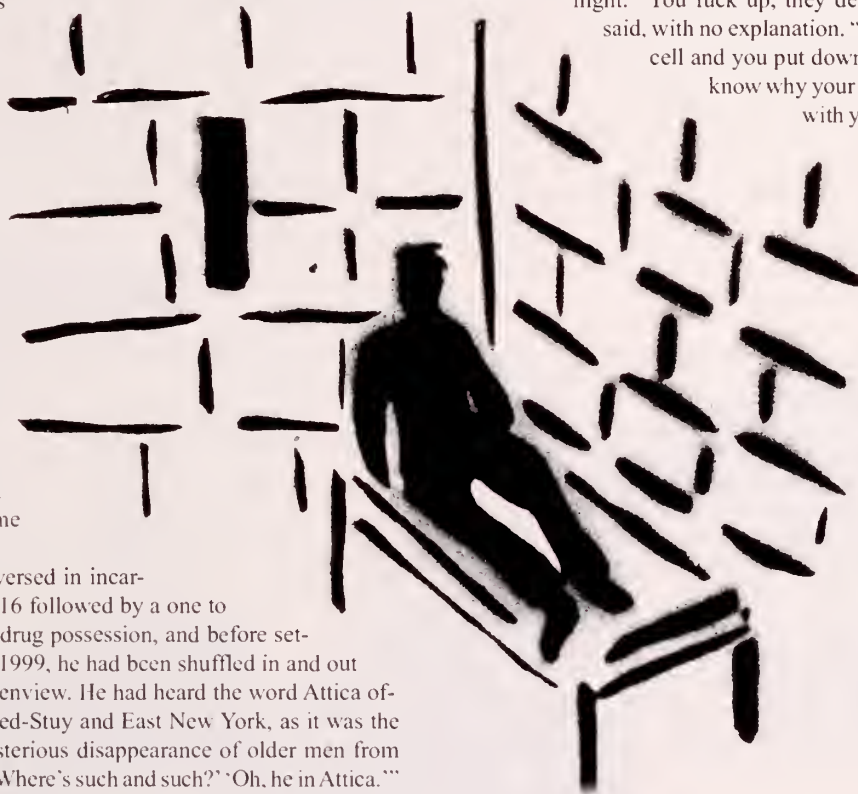
He acknowledged that the majority don't, and instead conduct themselves professionally, some even bending the rules by offering a warning before meting out punishment. "You know what you gotta do. You know the rules. If you break the rules, you gotta be able to handle the repercussions. There's gonna be repercussions, trust me."

At the end of our talk, he asked me many questions about New York City, as distant to him in time as in space. He spoke longingly of his last job - making coffee and delivering packages for an architectural firm in the Grace building opposite the New York Public Library. But what he missed most was the walk to and from work which brought him through the heart of Times Square. "That stuff I took for granted," he said, shaking his head.

Leaving Attica

When I left the prison this last time, the prison left me. An articulation of key in ignition initiated a series of restoring events. The air conditioner whirled, the interior cooled. The radio, set to the same station at the same volume, played a song I hadn't heard for years, yet I inexplicably knew all the lyrics. I sang along. As the wall shrank in the rear view mirror, captioned by the warning that objects are closer than they appear, then vanished. The world expanded again, safe on its hinges, what was behind disturbingly easy to forget. Men and women walked into and out of the bank, children played soccer in the park. I sped across the paved road, unnoticed, past the Food Jubilee, back into God's country. Heading back toward the Interstate, the map fluttering on the passenger seat like a live thing, I realized that unless you were looking for Attica, or it sought you, it would just be a distant, ominous word.

You'd never even know it was there. ☿



Lavender Lake

In 1609 Henry Hudson — employed by the Dutch at the time — sailed into one of the finest natural harbors in the world. Ever mindful of commercial possibilities, the Dutch soon established a settlement on this harbor and called it New Amsterdam. Just a few years later, they set up another little colony just across the water and called it Breukelen, after an 11th century village in Holland from which several of the original settlers had come.

What you have to understand about Dutch colonization in those days is that it was all very well and good if people were able to make satisfying lives for on this side of the Atlantic, but the colonies were not national efforts. They were commercial enterprises and, if they weren't making money for the parent company, someone had a lot of explaining to do.

Well, a couple of Dutchmen in the Brooklyn colony (for that is what the name Breukelen eventually metamorphosed into) did a little poking around and discovered a shallow creek extending a bit more than a mile inland from the harbor. You can just imagine their eyes lighting up at the thought of the shipping that might be facilitated with such a creek, and so Messengers Bennet and Bentijn sought out the local sachem — a fella by the name of Gouwane — and drew up a deed of sale. History does not record what Gouwane got, but the colonists strolled off with 930 acres of prime real estate.

I'm not writing a history book here, so let's fast-forward a couple of years, say, to the middle of the 19th century, when industrialization was the name of the game. The little creek that Bennet and Bentijn were so eager to have in their possession had been straightened out and lined with every conceivable kind of industry, but still bore the name of the sachem who'd been willing to let it go. It was called the Gowanus Canal and has been ever since.

As industry took up more and more of the canal's banks, residences took up less and less. The annual swimming contests — when kids from the surrounding neighborhoods jumped into the canal by the hundreds — became a thing of the past as the waters grew too polluted. During the summers (let me just tell you things can get awfully hot and steamy around here), the area around the Gowanus



(Not exactly America's Vacationland!)
by Fred Argoff

looking south down the Gowanus Canal



Canal became a good place to avoid. Just stick your nose in the air and breathe in – you can tell when you're near it!

Of course, there have always been people willing to stand up and make noise about cleaning up the canal. They paint wonderful pictures of its banks lined with trees and parks, people strolling along by the waters and stopping at whole neighborhoods full of cafes and outdoor restaurants. Until recently, such people could probably be accused of ingesting controlled substances, but, inexplicable as it might seem, there's a chance that they could have the last laugh.

About three years ago, someone discovered an old pumping system at the head of the canal. It had apparently been put in place at the beginning of the 20th century, but had lain dormant and forgotten for at least 85 years. Repaired and put back into service in 1998, the system brings aerated water to the canal from the harbor, thereby reducing stagnation and laying the groundwork for what could conceivably be little short of a miracle.

But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. The Gowanus Canal today is still not what you'd call a romantic place for a little tryst. It's surrounded by industry — one of the businesses in the area is a paint factory, and when they clean their vats every so often, the waters of the canal bloom with some pretty unnatural colors. That's the explanation for the nickname by which it has been known for many years: Lavender Lake.

The industrial districts in Brooklyn are positively unwelcoming to explore, and that goes double for weekends when most of them are closed. Here, in the midst of a city with just a shade under eight million residents, you can go wandering up and down streets upon which nobody lives.

The canal itself is actually fairly difficult to approach. Most of its banks are fenced off, though I'll tell you about one of the few exceptions so that if you happen to find yourself in Brooklyn, you'll know where to go for that close-up view. At the point where Second Avenue intersects Fifth Street, you can walk right up and stand on a little headland between the main body of the canal and one of its offshoot basins. I'm afraid that some of the photos might give the impression that the area is bucolic, but take my word for it, it's not.

And while the water surface looks calm and serene, you'd be making one hell of a bad decision if you thought about taking a quick dip. There are virulent strains of half a dozen loathsome diseases in that water. In fact, there's a documented case of some lowlife purse snatcher who figured to swim across the Gowanus in an attempt to escape from a couple of cops in hot pursuit. He made it across okay, but he was dead in less than a week from either emphysema or hepatitis — I forget which, but what difference does that make? He was dead. Incidentally, Brooklynites take this sort of thing in stride. Other people might hear such tales about the Gowanus and run screaming in fear; locals are more likely to make a dismissive wave of the hand and say, "Yeah, whaddayaknow about that!"

Surprisingly enough for such a desolate spot on the map, you can run across some fascinating history. The Carroll Street Bridge, which I've photographed, happens to be the oldest extant retractable bridge in the United States. It's been facilitating boat traffic on the Gowanus since 1889. I didn't know about this beforehand; I made the discovery completely by accident when I was wandering around in Brooklyn with a friend from out of town.

Trying to investigate the canal is also a good way to get some exercise. Since it's not easily accessible, you wind up going back and forth over quite a few streets in an attempt to get a good view. There are bridges at Carroll and Union Streets, Hamilton, and Third Avenues. You don't make a lightning fast raid. It's more of an all-day activity. And for a reward, you have the satisfaction of doing some urban exploration that practically none of the 24 million tourists who come to New York City each year ever attempt — or even imagine. ☿

the view of the Gowanus from 3rd Avenue



the Carroll Street Bridge



Wash that mouth

By erin mcwilliams



So how the hell did you get into THAT?

I had a friend who did it and I noticed that her standard of living was significantly higher than mine. I asked her about it and she said that her employer wasn't hiring at the moment. Several months later, they were, and within the week I was taking calls from horny men — and even a few women! — all over the globe.

So how does that work — do these guys have your HOME phone number? Doesn't that scare you?

No, no, nothing like that! While some extremely small operations with only a few employees might work that way, neither of the companies I've worked for have. It's all very professional: a "receptionist" calls me up, tells me a bit about the caller (e.g. "Hey Sandra, I have Joe Schmoe on the line for you — he's called about ten times now — he usually talks for about half an hour, and he's into foot worship, panties, and little boys. He might want you to call him "Melissa" repeatedly. Are you ready for Joe?") I then have the option to ask more about his "call history" or particular fetishes or say "Yup!", at which time Joe comes on the line. The receptionist will say "Hey Joe! I've got Sandra here on the line for you — Sandra?" I'll coo and giggle a little bit — squeal "Hihi Joe!" perhaps — and then the receptionist will leave me and Joe by our own little lonesomes on the fiberoptic superhighway.

So, uh, how does a conversation like this usually go? I wouldn't know what to do!

Talking to a horny man is pretty much a no-brainer — as long as you use the words "cock," "fuck," and "cunt" a lot and do plenty of moaning, you're good to go. I usually start off with some basic small-talk ... you know — How was work today? So where do you live? Are you dating anyone? These guys want to believe that I'm genuinely interested in who they are as people, and that they might actually get me off too.

They'll almost inevitably ask, at this point, what I'm wearing. I never tell them I'm naked! That takes all the fun out of it for them — they want to slowly talk me out of my clothes, which are, of course, always skimpy and lacy. How strange that they don't think it odd that I'm always wearing a short, tight skirt, crotchless panties, and a cleavage-baring blouse! As I noted before, making a randy feller shoot his spunk is hardly rocket science, but doing it with finesse is ... and if you want the guy to call back and request you, you're going to have to make it a call to remember! Some premium services charge a bit more than your standard 99 cents a minute, and the guys expect a bit more bang — no pun intended — for their buck. They want to talk to girls whose characters have personalities that are just as developed as their breasts — gals with believable stories, interests outside of sex, and real lives. And, of course, it's my job to make my life seem plausible. Some callers are repeat customers who I talk to several times a week, often making it a point to specifically ask for me. Some callers are totally new to the game, don't have any idea what they're doing, and aren't really sure what they want — a voice that probably belongs to a warm female body and is willing to listen to their heavy breathing is all they're really looking for, and anything else is icing on the cake. Some guys have elaborate, detailed fantasies and some just want to get off in two minutes flat. Some men don't even like to talk about sex at all — they're just lonely and want a friend. Guys who call phone sex are often assumed to fit a particular demographic — under-educated 20-something men with disposable income — but my callers have run the gamut. I've talked to married psychotherapists from Manhattan in their '70s, 18-year-old Christian high school seniors living at home who just got their first credit card (and have long had some strong homosexual tendencies that they need to talk about), indie-rockers from Chicago who were at the same shows as me, unbeknownst to them, (I wish I was kidding, but counterculture types are just as pervy as anyone else!), and transsexual women.

out with soap!

my stint as a phone-sex operator

(Yeah, I interviewed myself here. Don't laugh.)

Among other things, I am a phone sex operator. I talk dirty for money — quite a bit of it, in fact. “Wow. I’ve never met one of them before — I thought they were all ugly and old.” Yeah, I’ve heard that before. I am a smart, young, punk-inclined feminist with plenty of options at my feet and plenty of dreams for the future ... and a desire to have enough cash to do more than just pay the rent in the present. I am not a crack whore, a haggard mother of six, or an inarticulate nympho with breast implants — other things I’ve been told people imagine phone sex operators to be. Since I have been bombarded with questions about my line of work, I figured I’d take the time to answer some of them right here. Read on.

So did I hear you correctly, or did you actually say that some guys don't talk about sex at all?

Yes, that's right. Some fellas wanted to discuss everything BUT rutting like wild beasts, and were quick to bring the subject back to King Diamond or Martha Stewart LIVING every time I tried to bring some suggestive language into the conversation (hey, I've got to make myself feel useful!).

They must be really lonely! I mean, why would they pay two bucks a minute just to shoot the breeze?

Damned if I know! Yes, I assume that a lot of them just don't have anyone they can really talk to in their lives and actually feel better about chatting up a stranger who is obligated to listen to them than someone who neither gives a shit nor gets paid for pretending to. It was actually quite depressing at times to realize how many people out there feel so isolated, socially inept, and/or particularly terrified of females. As for me, I'd much rather jet off to Bora Bora if I had that kind of money to throw away, but hey — if these loaded schmucks want to make me rich for discussing the finer points (ha!) of Peter Cetera, I'll bite!

Tell me some funny stories — what are the strangest calls you've gotten?

One guy wanted me to pretend I was fucking Satan's Great Dane on a Catholic altar while I ridiculed Jesus for his small endowment, crying “You weren't man enough for me, Christ! I need Lucifer's cock!” Another found it particularly exciting when I threw him on the road and ran him over in my SUV, watching blood and guts spurt from his crushed head. A repeat caller was obsessed with braces and retainers, and couldn't come unless I discussed orthodontic equipment in detail, vividly describing how I wanted his ejaculate all over it. Perhaps my strangest call, though, was from a man who got off on hearing me talk about the eventuality of a matriarchy — I had to pull feminist mumbo-jumbo out of my ass, exaggerating my pro-woman stance to a ridiculous degree and spouting off rhetoric I scarcely agree with. I recall feigning profound excitement at the newly elected female prime minister of Finland, suggesting that surely it was a landmark victory and a certain sign that, thanks to Scandinavia, we were that much closer to a world ruled by women. (I'd like to think that there's a sliver of truth to this — that we'll see more and more females in positions of power — but I hardly believe that one gender should dominate, whether male or female.)

That call actually sounds HARD!

Yes! This isn't always an easy job. Some callers present challenges, if of a bizarre nature. One guy, for example, had a near-photographic memory, and always asked for extreme detail. I actually had to keep a running log of who I claimed I'd had sex with, exactly what we did, at what age the relations transpired, etc. If I slipped up, he'd call me on it, so I learned very quickly to keep my facts straight. Some callers had extremely specific fantasies that exhausted me — like the man who wanted me to describe the smell and texture of soiled panties in vivid detail. Raunchy, wet, kinky, funky, moist — none of these adjectives were adequate for him. I grasped at straws for twenty minutes, trying in vain to come up with a syllable for “smelly” that might satisfy him but met with little success. These types of guys can be frustrating, because they inevitably suggest that something's wrong with you — what are you, too stupid to know PRECISELY WHAT THEY WANT? Getting them off is like baking a cake — mess up one little detail, and you've got to start from scratch.

You mentioned getting a lot of repeat callers — are any of these guys psychotic stalkers?

Not quite, but close enough. The nature of the job prevents anyone from actually posing a physical danger to me. They don't know my real name, first and foremost, nor my actual geographical location. Luckily, I've spent considerable amounts of time in both of the cities that my characters live in, so I know the landscape well enough to bullshit a little here and there about the local color (if they so desire me to). Some of these guys, however, are indeed quite delusional about the nature of their relationship with me. One former caller of mine was certain that we were going to marry. He was an obese, shy, awkward virgin in his late '20s who primarily pursued relationships in the arena of the internet. He'd correspond with these girls online and then arrange to meet them, but he seemed to always get his heart broken — little wonder. He became almost immediately obsessed with my character, and for awhile we'd chat for an average of an hour nightly until he'd spent his entire trust fund. Although I thought he was creepy, I also grew to harbor concern for him in an older-sister kind of way. I was worried about him, and felt bad about the fact that he was so desperately lonely that he felt compelled to spend thousands upon thousands of dollars on phone sex. I never confirmed nor denied his continued insistent statements that he was my “boyfriend” — while I didn't want to lead him on and realized that in his

...ed fantasy world I might actually be capable of breaking his heart, I didn't want to flat-out tell him the truth — that he was a misguided fool — because he was almost single-handedly paying my rent for several months there.

This might sound funny, but did you ever talk to any guys you'd actually hang out with in real life?

Quite a few, in fact. I've had interesting conversations with grad students, zine editors, and generally nice guys. Of course, the fact that they could justify paying so much money to call a phone sex line always kept my respect of these dudes in check, but I actually did exchange email addresses with a couple of 'em.

So how's the cash flow? Are you making decent money doing this? I mean, it almost sounds like fun!

Well, it's a job, just like any other — the novelty of it wears off very, very quickly, although there's always still the occasional call that entertains me. (You've got to pull out all the stops to say anything that shocks or amuses me at this point, however — I've heard it all!) As far as unskilled jobs go (though it's almost arguable that this doesn't require great skill on some level!), it's one of the better ones I've had, and is by far the best paying. I've gotten paid by the minute with both of the companies I've worked for — 45 cents a minute with my last employers, and now fifty cents a minute. (That's excluding other goodies like panties and toys that bring in extra bucks!) Getting paid by the minute is nice, because I'm compensated for the amount of time I actually spend working, but it's hard for the same reason. If I have a particularly slow week, or one full of short calls (and there were plenty of both, believe me!), my paycheck reflects it.

What's your schedule like? Do you just take calls whenever you feel like it?

No, I have a set schedule of hours during which I have to be near a phone. Notice I didn't say "home!" I've worked from San Francisco while living in Chicago, thanks to some particularly sympathetic friends. As long as I can receive calls and have a comfortable atmosphere from which to work, I'm in business! This is nice, because I can take the occasional "working vacation" when I tire of my place of residence.

Do any of the calls actually get you off? Do you ever masturbate?

Yes, and yes. It's not kosher to admit it, but a caller will occasionally turn me on if I'm in the right mood. I've been known to be partial to British accents (in this arena, voice is EVERYTHING, so the bad teeth that often accompany this beautiful trait in real life don't enter into the picture!), and an interesting conversation with someone who has a keen interest in underground music will occasionally pique my curiosity enough to make my hands wander a little bit. Of course, this probably has more to do with the fact that I'm a very sexual person anyway than it does with the fact that I'm an especially big fan of phone sex. Still, these rare lapses are few and far between. I'm almost wholly unaroused by the grunts and smooth-talking of strange men with hard-ons straining the fibers of their boxer shorts, for the most part — surprised?

How has this affected your personal sex life? How do the people you date feel about you doing this?

I've been largely single during my tenure as a "Girl Six", but the folks I have casually dated have been more fascinated by my profession than anything ... a few even seemed intimidated, as if by entering the minds of the average male I'd acquired knowledge that can and would be used against them. If anything, I think it's made me a much better lover — more able to express my needs vocally, as if that wasn't a given. I've always thought that talking dirty during sex was hot, although most of

my lovers have been younger and more inexperienced, and thus inclined to shy away from such scandalous things as four-letter words.

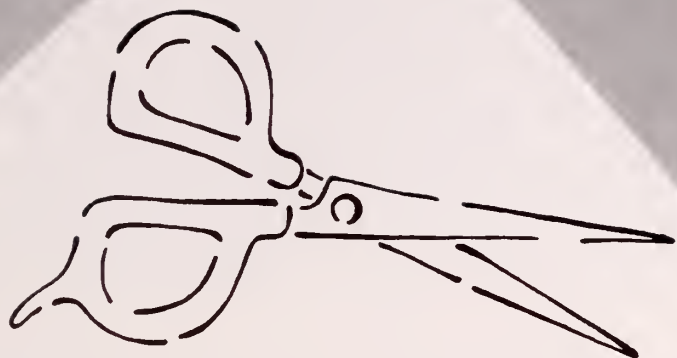
But don't you hate men now? I mean, if I talked to such single-minded assholes every day, I would!

As a former co-worker of mine once said, "I don't hate men now — just men who call phone sex." Even that, though, isn't entirely true. I recognize that my job serves a purpose and fills a specific need: men who have fantasies they don't feel comfortable expressing, for whatever reason, can feel safe talking about them with me. Repressed queers can talk about their fervent desire to eat sperm without feeling guilty about it. CEOs who are in positions of power in their everyday work lives can sit back and let me take over, dominating them to their heart's content. Men in largely sexless marriages whose wives epitomize the concept of "vanilla" and only allow them missionary-position intercourse can pretend to get fucked up the ass by a ten inch strap-on, bite my nipples until they bleed, and almost feel the rope burn around their wrists as I strap their four limbs to the bedposts and go to town. I will admit to feeling discouraged by the number of men who still hold archaic beliefs: that unnatural thinness and huge bulbous tits go hand in hand, that lesbians are just waiting to get fucked by a real man, that all Asian women are passive and docile and that black women are all sex-crazed maniacs. I talk to a ton of racists and homophobes, and while I try to gently steer the conversation away from discussions about "all these fucking spics coming in here and taking our jobs" or "those sick fairy fruits who take it up their shit-holes," I've a thin line to walk between subtly disagreeing with them and overtly offending them — and losing their business. I do have a few steadfast rules — I refuse to use any derogatory terms myself, including nigger and faggot, though many men will beg me to — they want to hear about how much I love watching them swallow dicks whole but have a lot of internalized homophobia, or they channel their racism into bizarre fantasies where I pant for huge chocolate-colored penises. It's hard to talk tough when a closeted gay man wants to be "forced" into getting ass-fucked with a whip: I want to refer him to the local queer support center or social club, but that's not part of my job. Likewise, it's often scary to hear the detailed fantasies of men who fantasize about molesting children. How many of these are would-be perpetrators? Am I, by pretending to be their 13-year-old neighbor, encouraging them to victimize a young girl, or am I just helping them to channel their sick impulses in a less damaging direction? To keep my sanity, I've got to of course believe the latter, though I can't say I haven't struggled with the morality of the sketchier calls on occasion. Ultimately, I guess I believe that, as a vegan, this job is infinitely less ethically questionable than my other job, which is working in the deli of a natural foods co-operative grocery. (Yeah, it's a co-op, but I cut meat and cheese all day, basically!)

Any last words?

I think the best thing that ever happened is when I dozed off during a call and, in a moment between sleep and waking, dreamed thought about Eleanor Roosevelt. I came to only to realize that I'd said, "She was such an amazing first lady!" aloud, much to my caller's confusion. I played it off like I was talking about the first woman I'd slept with, who, of course, knocked me off my feet in the sack. He bought it. ♪

The Big Snip



frank talk about reproduction,
male genitalia,
and life altering decisions

andrew mcLeod

This summer, a couple of weeks shy of my 27th birthday, I got a vasectomy. It is a fairly young age for this operation, especially for a single guy like myself, but I have known for years that it is something that I should do. The idea first filtered into my head sometime around my 20th year. I had recently been exposed to a lot of exotic ideas and one of them was that there are just too many damn humans running around, eating and pooping and buying stuff and driving and whatnot, and way too many of them are affluent North Americans.

I want to acknowledge that getting a vasectomy is a very serious thing. My intent here is not to inspire a bunch of 20-year-olds (or 30-year-olds, for that matter) to say, "Hey, that sounds cool, I wanna get myself fixed too," then all run out and do something rash and essentially permanent. A vasectomy is usually reversible, but that is a serious and expensive operation. I am glad that I waited for most of a decade to do this, even if the delay nearly scuttled my aspirations to be a genetic dead-end. A decision of this magnitude needs to be thought about long and hard. Maybe seven years is overdoing it, but it was what I needed and I'm glad I took it.

In addition to not wanting to make a personal contribution to overpopulation, I had other reasons to avoid breeding – I had a lot of political aspirations that didn't exactly mesh with being a good father. Given the social and political reality of the modern world, it seemed irresponsible to think that anyone, let alone a young revolutionary like myself, could commit to take care of another person for two decades or longer. I figured that I would probably wind up in prison or hit by a comet or something long before any hypothetical child of mine learned geometry, let alone take care of herself in an unstable world.

While my abstract political justifications for a vasectomy were in place for many years, it was not until a few years ago that my beliefs were really challenged. I became involved in a long-term relationship with a woman for whom procreation is one of her highest goals in life. It is a primal and beautiful urge that I honor and respect, but one that I want no part of. We were quite in love with each other, and it was a huge source of stress for us that we had this apparently unsolvable conflict looming. We pictured ourselves as life partners, but couldn't see any way around this basic incompatibility. I was open to adoption, and am all in favor of taking care of any kids who are already here, but she wanted to give birth. I suggested finding someone else to provide the sperm, but she wanted a father in the traditional sense. Our relationship appeared doomed. I knew that I eventually needed to get a vasectomy, but didn't want to unilaterally end the discussion. So I stalled.

Finally, she told me that it would be easier for her if I just went ahead and did it, so she would be forced to acknowledge that I was serious, that I wasn't going to come around. I thought about it for a couple of months, then told her that I would be going ahead. She responded by ending the relationship, which was not what I had expected. Even after I came out of that funk, I still realized that I was not in a position to make a life-changing decision. I went in for an initial counseling session, but was obviously not ready to go through with it, and backed down. A combination of remorse over my breakup and difficulty in setting aside a couple of weeks for post-op recuperation kept me from moving forward for several months.

While I dreaded the possibility of getting involved with someone who wanted to have a child with me, I was also a bit hesitant to finally stop thinking about it and do the deed. I was concerned about how it might affect the energy flow of sex, and my mother

was feeding me articles about elevated risks of prostate cancer, so I wanted to be sure of what I was doing.

I lurked on internet discussion lists, and contacted a few vasectomized men who had experience with Kundalini or tantric sex to ask about whether they had noticed any difference (they hadn't). I read medical studies (all of the scary reports I found appeared to be inconclusive and many had clear detection bias). I talked to people versed in acupuncture and Chinese medicine to try to track down information on the more esoteric workings of the male anatomy (I couldn't find anything on the subject other than a feeling that scar-tissue should be minimized). The conclusion that I drew from all this is that usually it turns out fine, but sometimes it doesn't. Life is like that.

So this brought up the question of whether I wanted to end years of successfully avoiding mainstream medicine like the plague. I haven't taken prescription medicine in nearly a decade, and view surgery as a drastic action to be taken only in special circumstances. So why was I considering letting some small-town surgeon remodel my plumbing? Why was I suspending my scorn for Western medicine to guard against something that I could also do with birth-control, abstinence, or fertility awareness?

Well, for starters, those methods all are much less effective than sterilization, even when used perfectly, which is a hassle (Yes! Admit it! You don't actually enjoy putting on a condom, or subjecting your partner or yourself to the chemical warfare we know as the Pill). However, to be fair, vasectomies are not always successful (more on that later), but the chances of failure are about one in 1000 – much better than the failure rate for condoms.

Of course, it was all pretty hypothetical, because I wasn't having sex with anyone, and unless I got into a long-term relationship I would still have to use condoms to stay safe. In fact, this is one of the reasons that vasectomies are generally discouraged for young bucks like myself – without the threat of dirty diapers looming (only the relatively mild spectres of death and disease), it is a lot more tempting to roll the dice with unprotected sex. There is a high rate of remorse – lots of people (including my parents) have felt like they don't want to have any kids while they are in their 20s, but later change their minds. This is a

The operation was quite surreal, and I don't think it was just the drugs. I'm not sure if most men are interested in watching this sort of thing, as it goes against a taboo driven into us from a very young age (i.e. the one about keeping strange men with knives away from the genitals), but I was fascinated to the point of literally taking notes and asking all sorts of questions.

valid concern, but I figure that I have a lot of deeply felt beliefs which would definitely cause me to feel remorse if I did father a child. And I really don't want to go through life raising a child that I am not thrilled to have. So hypothetical remorse in a world full of orphans is a non-issue for me.

In any case, after months and years of indecision, it is history now. This spring I finally decided that as soon as I finished travelling, I was going to do the deed.

THE DEED

I got my procedure through a state-funded program that provides low-cost vasectomies. I was offered a sliding scale, and my income level put me in the free bracket. From what I understand, most states have similar programs, so don't let money be an obstacle; get on down to the clinic and find out what the government can do for you!

In order to get the Man to ante up for the big snip, I had to jump through a couple of hoops (which are also required by conscientious doctors even if you pay cash).

The first hoop was to convince a counselor that I knew what I was asking for, and that I really wanted it. Her job was to raise her eyebrows at my doing this before I had a child or three. She also expressed concern at my not being in a relationship, and being relatively young, both of which she described as "red flags."

The second hoop was a waiting period, just to be sure. After my counselling session, I signed a "Consent to be Sterilized" form and then had to wait for a month before I could actually have the operation.

It was an interesting month. Suddenly this abstract scheme that had been simmering for years turned into a doctor's appointment at three o'clock on Wednesday, June 21.

THE DAY THE DEED WAS DONE

Basically the procedure consists of severing the vas deferens (the sperm's pipes of destiny). The vas leading from each testicle is pulled out of the scrotum through a quarter-inch incision, cut, and each end is sealed shut. While I do use the term "fixed" jokingly in this article, the procedure bears little resemblance to the complete removal of an animal's testicles, and leaves the genitals fully operational (for

recreational purposes only, mind you).

The operation really isn't a big deal, a simple in-and-out affair, with local anesthetic and only a few minutes between the last sutures and shuffling out to the car for a hazy ride home. They gave me a couple of pills beforehand to help me relax, since guys apparently tend to get a little uneasy when it comes time to drop their drawers. I was supposed to take the first one two hours before show time, so I popped it just before running some errands.

By the time that 3:00 rolled around, I wasn't even stoned. Plus the doctor was behind schedule, so I was told to hold off on my second pill. I figured that it wasn't going to be much of a trip, since the first pill was probably wearing off by this time.

Finally, almost an hour later, it was my turn. I was shown into a room that resembled a large dentist's office more than anything, complete with fancy recliner chair. I sat down while the doctor got his toys out, and he asked me the big question: "Are you sure you want to do this? It isn't too late." I realized that this was really it, the last time I would be asked. I told him I was ready.

The operation was quite surreal, and I don't think it was just the drugs. He had me pull my pants down partway. Then he put a cloth over me with a small hole in the middle, through which he pulled my testicles. He checked me out to make sure that everything was where it was supposed to be, gave me a cleaning with medicinal-smelling soap and cold water, then shaved the front of my scrotum. After a shot of local anesthetic took effect, he got down to business.

I'm not sure if most men are interested in watching this sort of thing, as it goes against a taboo driven into us from a very young age (i.e. the one about keeping strange men with knives away from the genitals), but I was fascinated to the point of literally taking notes and asking all sorts of questions. He seemed pretty amused, but after a while I realized that I probably should just shut up and let him focus on what he was doing.

He made a small incision in my scrotum, then inserted some tongs and pulled out one of my vas deferens. I guess the drugs were kicking in, because things started getting a bit fuzzy. It didn't seem like he was actually working on me. Rather, there was just this sack of skin on a napkin and he was pulling some little tube out of it. I was struck by how long it was taking him to make each cut; I guess I was expecting him to just whip out some scissors and be done with it. But he explained that there are seven layers of tissue that make up a vas deferens, and each had to be dealt with separately. And once the cut is made, each end must be sewn shut and cauterized to avoid leaks.

I was getting pretty loaded by this point, and don't even remember the second incision, or how it all ended. I only have a vague recollection of the drive home and stopping at the store to get a couple of packages of frozen peas (great ice-packs). My chauffeur surprised me with a slice of cheesecake from the deli, and even had them put a big red "V" on it. I don't normally eat such things, but I thought of all the cheesecake that my offspring won't be eating, and figured that it was OK. Just this once.

Back at home, I settled in on the living room couch, and fell asleep before my housemates could get back with movies. I slept for 14 hours.





WEEK ONE

My first day of recuperation held no surprises and was more boring than anything. As predicted, I experienced some bruising around the base of my penis, and my scrotum swelled up to about the size of a tennis ball. Standing up got uncomfortable quickly, as additional blood flowed down into my delicate genitals. So I was only able to take a very short shower, then it was back to the couch and frozen peas. By far the largest trauma up to this point was adjusting from my usual free-range boxer shorts reality to wearing a hideous yellow thong.

The handy vasectomy checklist recommend acquiring a jock strap, but I already had my nylon monstrosity (complete with velcro quick-escape tabs on the

side) that I acquired as a joke somewhere along the line. But if I ever do this again I will probably get a real jock strap, rather than endure two weeks of feeling like I have a wedgie all the time. The tenderness was bad enough, and in retrospect the velcro should have eluded me in that this thing was not meant to be worn for longer than a minute. But being naive, I figured that I should just save the money and resources and use what I already had. On the bright side, this provided me with a feeling of having a sexy little secret at a time when I wasn't feeling particularly sexy.

In fact, on the first day the whole operation felt a little pointless, because my genitals were pretty grumpy, and it felt like it might not be a bad thing to just never get an erection again, let alone use it. Vigorous thrusting seemed entirely out of the question.

The second day, I was getting concerned by the amount of swelling. Even keeping myself well-supported and iced down, my swollen scrotum felt really heavy and I was concerned that I was beginning to develop a complication that my doctor had charmingly referred to as "Basketball Jones." So I called in, and while he told me he couldn't diagnose over the phone, it didn't sound like I was experiencing anything too worrisome.

This was the most painful day, but still not really bad. The only time I touched my prescription meds was in the second week, and that was mostly out of curiosity about what sort of buzz they offered (not much). I figured that if I was doing something that was

was that my testicles became a perfectly normal topic of conversation for a while. As I was leaving an attractive friend of mine gave me a particularly long and flirtatious hug, and I surprised myself by getting a little bit of an erection. Maybe there was hope after all.

Day three brought with it the first real surprise. The night before I had noticed that the skin of my scrotum had seemed a bit odd, almost paper-like, and this morning it was beginning to peel. It was coming off like after a bad sunburn, only painless. This was bizarre, and violated one of the cardinal phobic rules of male genitalia: Nothing is supposed to fall off. It freaked me out a bit, because even though this was just skin, I had the primal fear that this was just the beginning of the whole thing falling off.

I have two theories about this rather unusual side-effect. The first is that a combination of the nylon tight against my skin and overzealous application of peas somehow made things too moist for the skin to handle the constant stretching of my swollen package. The second (which I like better) is that I was molting. Perhaps it was a psychosomatic sigh of relief that this decision that had been looming for years was now over and done with.

Nevertheless, I started taking it more easy with the peas, and switched to wearing my thong over my boxer shorts, just to be safe.

This was also my first day back at work, as a guide at a nature center. I managed a half-mile hike without much trouble, but it was good to sit down when it was all over. That evening I was feeling feisty enough to go to a party. I had a good time for a while,

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making me uncomfortable, I should damn well know about it so I could stop right away. It amazed me how little real pain was involved, and the whole thing mostly just felt like I had been kicked in the nuts a few hours ago.

It was only when I jostled myself that I felt that familiar abdominal twinge of pain. I imagine that the whole thing was like a really bad case of menstrual cramps, and in fact the doctor explained that the reason why a blow to the testicles is felt up there is that during fetal development, what later becomes testicles spend a while in the area where a woman's ovaries stay. Apparently the testicular nerves never fully adjust to the rerouting.

That afternoon, I went out for a test walk, and found that while I was definitely slowed down, I wasn't waddling or moving like Charlie Chaplin (an image whose mere suggestion caused me pain). But by the time I got home, I was ready for my peas.

In the evening, I made my first public appearance at an art exhibit opening, and was struck by how word had gotten around. A number of people asked me, "How are you feeling?" with clear implication. Indeed, one of the strangest parts of this whole experience

but it turned out to be too much for one day. I could really tell that I was putting a lot of energy into healing, and by midnight I had turned into a pumpkin, but still had to wait around for my ride. It didn't help that there was a white-trash fashion show going on. Some folks were even doing a bit of striptease, and I was tempted to join in with my ridiculous secret undergarment, but knew that I was in no shape for the gyrations that would've been needed to do it justice. So I just sat there moping.

Day four was the first day that I started feeling like my life was returning to normal. I led three short hikes at work, which was plenty. It wasn't too traumatic, but I did head straight for my peas when I got

he tried walking around without the thong and I realized that I was not ready for that yet; even movement provided a little jolt. It is amazing what difference a little support makes.

Although I was mostly feeling pretty good, I spent 12 hours in bed that night. I could tell I needed this, and any energy that I spent elsewhere would slow my healing process. I knew that I was entering one of the trickiest parts of healing, when things feel good enough to lull one into complacency that ends with aggravating the injury.

On day five, my molt was mostly complete, leaving me with a nice fresh layer of skin on my scrotum and penis, and no sign that anything had ever happened.

On the sixth day, I was out for a walk, and the main thing that was bothering me was a little blister forming between my toes. I realized that I hadn't thought about my testicles for a long while, and smiled at this major turning point in my recovery.

ONWARD TO STERILITY

During the first week of recovery, I was advised to avoid ejaculation, as well as heavy lifting and contact sports (no thank you). The force of ejaculation has the potential to blow out the healing ends of my freshly-breached vas, or otherwise cause harm during those tender days. But for the next five weeks, the advice was quite different.

A vasectomy is not immediately effective, as many sperm remain in the pipes downstream of the plug, and must be given time to be pushed out or die. So other methods of birth control must still be used, lest a severely ironic impregnation occur. A man is not officially sterilized until his semen tests negative

off, all systems seemed to be responding normally to the arousal, and I was pleased to note that the erection wasn't painful.

The main difference in my sexual response seems to be in the amount of semen, which has dropped to about half of my pre-surgery volume. And while not being able to spurt quarts may be a concern for all you budding porn stars out there, it suits me fine. After all, it is less of a mess to clean up, and I presume that the loss in volume is simply from the testicles' usual contribution to ejaculation staying put and being reabsorbed by my body.

The second week I phased out my thong, and by the beginning of the third, I went out dancing and apparently overdid it: I danced until my nuts were pretty sore from all the bouncing. It didn't really concern me until a couple of days later, when I had some red streaks show up in my semen. This violated (or perhaps transcended) another of the cardinal rules of male genitalia: Only two things are supposed to come out of there, and blood is definitely not on the list. Along with the lingering pain in my phantom ovaries, this added to a weird sense of femininity. Ordinarily I am all for gender-fuck, but I wasn't quite in the mood under the already emasculating circumstances of having my, uh, male-ness rearranged.

The doctor had warned that this might happen if I came too soon after the surgery, and that it wasn't a big deal if it did. So I wasn't too alarmed. But after several normal ejaculations, I was still concerned enough to call because this seemed to be moving in the wrong direction.

But just my luck, the office was closed for two weeks of vacation and I was on my own. After a second crimson incident, the following ejaculation had a little bit of blood in the beginning of it before things returned to their normal color scheme. So I stopped worrying and mostly forgot about it until I got my test results back, which indicated that I'm not firing blanks yet.

This news put me into a bit of a funk, wondering whether all this hassle and discomfort was for nothing. It sounds like my sperm count is low, but not yet zero. If I do have a leak, it will probably mean that my chances of impregnating someone are much lower, but that isn't quite good enough. I am supposed to bring in another sample in a few more weeks, to see if all the little guys have finally died off.

I hope they do, because I still am not sure of what comes after a failed vasectomy. I'm glad I did it, and I would do it again, but I don't want to have to do it twice. ♀



I danced until my nuts were pretty sore from all the bouncing. It didn't really concern me until a couple of days later, when I had some red streaks show up in my semen. This violated another of the cardinal rules of male genitalia: Only two things are supposed to come out of there, and blood is definitely not on the list.

for sperm. This test is administered after six weeks or 20 ejaculations, whichever comes first.

But even though I knew I wouldn't be able to keep up the pace of four times a week, I did still want to make sure everything was working down there. And while I haven't really put things to the test having sex, so far I haven't noticed a significant negative difference with solo orgasms. So I'm sorry that I can't give a definitive answer to what sex is like, but rest assured that I am more curious than you are.

I did wind up messing around with a friend a bit early in the second week, and while no clothes came

Nonmonogamy and Polyamory: fancy words for “free love”

Alternatives to Monogamy Part 2

Jen Angel and Jason Kucsma

Ever since we printed the original “Alternatives To Monogamy” article in issue 2 (“Maybe We Should See Other People” April/May 2000), it seems like we’ve talked the topic to death. We’re happy to oblige! Our positive experiences (and possibly more valuable screw-ups) with nonmonogamy have made us unwitting spokespersons. It’s weird, because there are so many other people out there with much more positive and negative experiences to learn from. So rather than proselytize even more on the subject, we thought we’d get some feedback from others who have dealt with polyamory in their own lives. Given the societal taboos against talking about anything non-traditional, what better place than in the pages of this magazine to open up the floodgates of dialogue?

Our first discussion pretty much just broached the subject. We talked about how we have found that through trust, honesty and communication, open relationships — though often more work than traditional relationships — can be rewarding. This challenges common misconceptions of polyamory, including the notion that open relationships lack security, longevity, or true satisfaction. It’s no wonder that people feel this way, when our only exposure to nonmonogamy is through the mainstream media, which usually just shows us people cheating on each other, being dishonest, and in general, being disrespectful.

As we said, our experiences have shown otherwise. Through trial and error (read: lots of heartbreak along the way), we’ve learned some valuable lessons about challenging tradition in relationships. Having broached the subject, we feel it is important to back it up with concrete examples. It’s like the difference between reading about an experiment and then actually doing it for yourself — this is the hands-on portion of our discussion. By giving examples of real, nontraditional relationships, we hope to make it easier for you all to accept nonmonogamy as a possible alternative.

Like how does it *really* work? There are certain practical questions that people must get over before they are able to even begin to conceptualize these relationships. Like, if you’re seeing two people at once, is it a three-way? Is it all about sex? Does nonmonogamy = orgies every day? Jerry Springer and eight million porno flicks would probably have you think so, but honestly, it’s not like that.

Before we get into a few specific illustrations, there are a few things we must get on the table. We believe that any relationship, open or otherwise, should be based on respect and love. Every action you take in your relationships must be done with utmost respect for each person involved, especially your self. This means being honest, considering others’ feelings, and most importantly, keeping an eye on the big picture. Most of all, being in an open relationship requires you to act responsibly all of the time. Yeah, we know that’s a lot to ask.

Also, please keep in mind that there are as many different kinds of nonmonogamous relationships as there are people, so pretty much we are advocating finding a relationship that works for you, and making the effort to custom make your own relationship instead of always falling back on tradition.

Open relationships work a lot of different ways. While some polyamorous people have a primary partner with whom they spend most of their time, and who has a sort of “final word” about their partner’s other relationships and the terms, others choose to develop their relationships less hierarchically and view each of their partners as potential equals. A good example of the first kind of relationship is a married or established couple who live together, but each person sees others casually on the side. On the other hand, you could have a woman who sees two men and treats them equally. Possibly she would live by herself, see each man a couple of times a week, and be equally as involved and committed to each of them. They, of course, would know about each other.

For example, our friend John, a 27-year-old, primarily heterosexual, primarily monogamous, man, told us that he values the former type of nonmonogamy for this reason:

“I like an arrangement that when a primary partner gets the hots for someone else, that it is talked about, that the other partner is given a chance to check in and voice concerns. There should also be a chance, in a primary relationship, to veto any new lovers, whether it is due to personal discomfort with the new lover, or with the timing. It is important, however, that the veto be given with the understanding that it does force a choice to be made, and could lead to the end of the primary relationship.”

Martin, on the other hand, is a 29-year-old gay man. His partner, Terrance, is 39 years old, and they are in a long term, secure relationship. They live together and consider each other “primary partners,” in that other relationships they have are considered primarily sexual and not committed. Martin describes their relationship:

“Neither of us have other peripheral partners. Our relationship is open in the sense that we are free to have sex with whomever we choose, whenever we feel it’s appropriate. This includes all times of the day, whether we are apart or together (3/4-ways are fair game too), and this is not limited to times when we are separated by distance, (if one of us were to go out of town for the weekend, etc.).

There are no limits as far as where the person lives. The only boundary regarding sex is making sure if we choose to have anal sex, that it’s protected sex.



Otherwise, we are free to do as we please. As far as dating is concerned or having other partners, it's just not an issue. It's mainly a result of practicality and non-interest. Neither of us feel the need. Also, the time constraints would make it very difficult for either of us to actually pursue someone else."

Margaret and Luis have a different arrangement. They are both in their mid twenties. They do not live together, and while they are in a long term, committed relationship, do not consider each other "primary partners." Both agree that prioritizing one relationship over others is not fair to the potential relationships that one partner may develop. For Luis, the reason for avoiding primary partner categorization circumvents unequal power dynamics that many relationships are prone to:

"Allowing one person to tell the other what they can and cannot do with someone else places undue stress on the primary relationship and skews the power dynamics in such a way that one person will inevitably walk away feeling like their needs or desires have been invalidated. One of the reasons I am in open relationships has to do with a certain lack of comfort in the control both myself and my partner had over each other. Not only am I uncomfortable with the practice of someone telling me who I can (and cannot) be intimate with, I also get little solace from exercising that same power over someone I am seeing. To me, privileging one primary relationship over others simply reinforces the same (primarily patriarchal) hierarchies that traditional relationships often fall back onto."

So each relationship is different. Primary partner, no primary partner. What about specifics? Margarite describes her relationship:

"My relationship is different from others I've had in the past. My partner and I live in the same town, and we're pretty much best friends as well as "a couple." Currently, I'm not seeing anyone else, but my partner has other partners, at least one that is long-term. Some of his partners, past and present, I'm friends with, others I don't know so well or just don't interact with much — his current "other" relationships are all out-of-town, which alleviates a lot of issues. It's fine, because I trust him completely, and we are very good at communicating about any issues that come up. Though we don't live together, we see each other pretty much every day, but only sleep together once a week or so. Sometimes people we meet can't tell right away whether we're lovers or just close friends."

Just how does all this work with all these different partners running around? What if you all happen to be in the same room together? Heaven forbid! Don't you get jealous? A lot of couples alleviate this problem by dating others outside of their home town, or dating in different social circles that don't overlap. In other relationships, everyone involved is friends or at least casual acquaintances. Most people assume that the biggest problem nonmonogamous couples face is jealousy. Jealousy is the hurdle that people just can't seem to get over when they think about or consider open relationships, where we have found that this isn't really the case for many couples. It can be said that jealousy is a social construct, where a

person becomes jealous when their possession of another person is threatened. Nonmonogamous relationships, at their base, challenge the notion of possession and require each person involved to act independently, as an individual, without asserting any kind of "ownership" over their partner. If you truly trust your partner to be honest with you and you communicate openly with each other, jealousy and suspicion become obsolete.

Despite this, jealousy is still an issue (though a minor one) and needs to be dealt with. When does jealousy come in to play? When are jealous feelings a justified manifestation of feeling neglected by a partner and when are they a product of issues that have nothing to do with the relationship(s) at hand?

A number of people we talked to brought up the fact that jealousy in relationships is not something exclusive to open relationships. Carrie, a 23-year-old who identifies herself as 80 percent heterosexual, addressed the myth that jealousy is the Achilles' heel of open relationships:

"I think that everyone has encountered it (jealousy) in monogamous relationships so why not in nonmonogamous ones too? The difference is that at least in a nonmonogamous relationship you know what you are jealous about and you are more likely to talk about it. In monogamous relationships people often get jealous because of the 'thought' of someone doing something instead of the 'action.'"

Patrick, who has been with the same primary partner nonmonogamously for over thirteen years, acknowledged that jealousy is a real issue that needs to be dealt with in open relationships, but echoed Carrie's sentiments in suggesting discussion of those feelings is far more productive than ignoring them.

"We give each other space to feel it (jealousy). Some things are common courtesy, going on and on about your fantastic new lover while not making any dates or time for your primary partner is just rude. We try to work out where the feelings come from (i.e. is there a real reason to be jealous?)"

Patrick brings up an important issue: disclosure. Some people know they have a problem with jealousy, and ask their partners not to tell them anything about what they do with others. They need to disconnect from the situation. This can be unhealthy, if one person in a relationship is trying to ignore the fact that their partner sees others, but can also just be a matter of personal taste. On the other hand, many relationships have almost complete disclosure, especially in relationships where a lover is also a best friend, and where partners want to be involved in what is important in each other's lives.

It is important, always, to respect honesty. Even if your partner says something you do not want to hear, you need to respect that they are honest with you, and with themselves. For example, say you are jealous that your partner is spending all their time with a new "special friend." You talk about it, and your partner admits that their feelings have changed toward you and they are interested in spending all their time with this new person. Sure, it hurts, but their honesty can save you weeks or months of difficulty. Of course, in such a case, your partner had better be sure they are being honest with themselves about what they want.

So, jealousy is manageable, and it is important to



find a solution that works for you — and most of all, it is important to be able to talk about jealousy when it happens so that you can find solutions. Also keep in mind that love is not a zero-sum game — when your partner develops love for someone else, it does not have to mean that they lose the love they have for you.

Now that we've talked about jealousy, we have to admit that most of the people we talked to said that jealousy wasn't an issue... in fact, Martin calls it a "non-issue." If jealousy isn't the problem, what is? Perhaps the biggest problem for polyamorous people is time, and the lack of it. Margaret contributes:

"If I am ever jealous, it's because I feel that I am not getting enough time with my partner. It really has nothing to do with the 'other woman' or of my partner's feelings toward her. I just get annoyed if I feel I am being neglected. I guess jealousy isn't the right word for it. This means that if my partner was spending a lot of time at work and I was feeling left out in the cold, the feelings would be the same. But all it takes is bringing up the issue, and saying 'Hey, I need some more attention over here!' — within reason of course. If I'm always demanding to be the center of attention, then my partner needs to bring that up to me as well."

Being in an open relationship means making sure your partner's needs are being met (even if not directly by you), and being mature enough to accurately assess your own needs. Time is a big one, and this is where the maturity comes in. When you meet some new exciting person, and you want to "date" them in addition to the person(s) you are already seeing, you need to decide if you will really have enough time for each person that you care about, to make sure the needs you fill in their life are being met.

Many monogamous couples are very dependent — and happily so. But, if you want a relationship where you will always know where you partner is at every moment, or if you want their every thought to be of you, polyamory may not be the right choice.

If open relationships are all this work, and you have to be *communicating* all the time, why bother? Many people we talk to seem to think that open relationships are more work than they are worth, and that people should just stick with one partner. Still, many people defy that logic and cultivate nonmonogamous relationships. Why bother? Isn't it just easier to settle down with one person and be their "everything?"

For some, justification for having open relationships may be rooted simply in the acknowledgement that people need and desire physical affection and not necessarily from the same person all the time. For Patrick, maintaining open relationships earns its keep partially in the intimacy people are able to pursue with other partners.

"It's really nice to be able to be with people with different bodies, different desires, different fetishes etc. I also love the immediate intimacy you get with people you fool around with and that pursuing-a-new-crush feeling. Those are some of the things that make life worth living."

For Luis, the answer to the "Why Nonmonogamy?" question lies not just in the freedom to have sex with whomever he wants, but rather in the effect that nonmonogamy has had on his life as a whole.

"I would have to say that my life has never been better than it is right now. That is not to say that this comes solely from being in open relationships, but it has played a big part in increasing my self-esteem and consequently improving my relationships with people, in general. The ability to allow myself to connect emotionally, intellectually, creatively and even physically with a number of different people has given me the freedom to explore more fully who it is that I am and what kind of people provide a really positive influence for my life."

Martin expressed similar thoughts on how openness not only affected he and his partner individually, but also how their openness affected their

relationship as a whole:

"... I think in a round about way, our open relationship has even had an impact on other parts of our lives, involving honestly and communication. It seems we're both able to talk about issues that we might not have even thought to bring up (mainly to friends), which is great. Why are we here, if not to live and learn from each other?"

Beyond just discussion, the positive energy created by one relationship can be carried over into others. When things are going well with a certain lover, you feel better in general and this carries over into all aspects of your life.

The basic concept is that we act in this world as individuals, to improve our lives and the lives of those we care about. Polyamory is about doing what is best for you, while respecting the needs, wishes, and boundaries of those around you — and most importantly, loving without possessing. It is about releasing our partners to do as they please, without feeling threatened, or without demanding all of their time and energy for our selves. It is also about meeting new people and being able to let your relationship take a natural course, without any preset limits or boundaries.

Hopefully this brief discussion has given you some insight into polyamory, and maybe even piqued your interest enough to inspire new discussions among friends and lovers. We hope that this will also give validation to those readers who we know are dealing with these issues in their own lives. After the first essay appeared, many people wrote telling us that they had been thinking about approaching their partner about the possibility of introducing nonmonogamy into their relationship. Others who are already enjoying open relationships told us that it was great to see us writing about issues that they felt they were dealing with in a vacuum. Similarly, a friend mused to us the other day that an entire volume needs to be written about polyamorous fuck-ups — what happens when things get royally screwed up between you and someone you love and you can't figure out how to right them?

Although there are many other aspects to open relationships we can cover here, we'll leave you with one simple thought. Perhaps the justification for monogamy can best be summed up in something a friend said once, "I don't ever want to be told that I can't love someone." ☿



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R2K

By Casey Boland
Photos: Greg Fuchs

The City of Brotherly Love rolled out the red, white and blue carpet for its number one guests from near and far during the summer of 2000. Forty-five thousand were expected. The city hoped the influx would inject \$300 million into the local economy (the experts tell us such figures are impossible to determine). All the posh hotels were booked months in advance, as were the ritzy restaurants with names like *Le Bec Fin*. What was the source for this celebration? The Republicans chose Philadelphia as the site for its presidential-candidate-choosing gala event. Such an affair required a substantial number of uninvited guests to protest the insular political proceedings.

Activists, radicals and other concerned citizens united in Philly to highlight the many social and political issues they believe the Republicans and the Democrats were consciously ignoring in the vapid presidential campaign. Though the media would say otherwise, the demonstrators raised serious, vital issues, including globalization, capitol punishment, health care, the criminal (in)justice system, campaign finance reform, homelessness and other economically engendered inequities. And these folks promised to put their bodies in the cogs of the city machinery to have their voices heard.

Consequently (and due in no small measure to the shenanigans in Seattle and Washington DC), a very public corralling of the Philly cop troops occurred in the months preceding the big event. News reports and articles appeared displaying the vigorous training and the mobilization of over 7,000 boys (and some girls) in blue. Police Commissioner

John Timoney promised not to use any of that "Ninja Turtle" equipment they used at the WTO and IMF protests. No, his soldiers would be like real ninjas, cool and calm and ready to disarm their foes with a deadly stare. Of course, it wouldn't hurt to harass the local activists and radicals. People got up in the morning to see guys in suits rummaging through their trash (well-dressed homeless men with cell phones perhaps?). They went to meetings and were photographed and videotaped. Some were abducted by UFOs (Unidentified F.O.P. Officers) and grilled on activist tactics and asked really important questions, like what the hell was up with these puppets?

Not satisfied with tapping phone lines and infiltrating activist groups (like that guy in the blue hair and ARMY T-shirt with the A as an anarchy symbol was fooling anyone), the cops had Licenses & Inspections evict the Spiral Q space on Sansom Street. The building housed those hideous and frightening villains of upstanding citizens everywhere: puppet-makers. Not surprisingly, L & I couldn't adequately justify their actions and even contradicted itself in explaining why their act was not politically motivated. Within hours the space was reopened.

July 24 kicked off the Convergence week, when thousands of activists and radicals descended upon the city to prepare for the following week's protest fun. Several sites throughout West Philly and Center City hosted the week's worth of workshops and teach-ins on direct action, legal training, first aid, globalization, radical labor organizing and much more. Most venues were open all day and offered homemade vegan grub.

PD (Philadelphia Direct Action Group) was the major organizer behind the convergence.

On Saturday July 29, I hopped on my black and red bike and sped off beneath a gloomy, overcast sky to see what I may stumble upon. As I journeyed up 16th Street I noticed legions of boys in blue and a couple of helicopters buzzing overhead — telltale signs that people were exercising some democratic rights of which law enforcement does not approve. As I got up towards Market, I saw a thick mob of heads, bodies, banners, puppets, and signs. I heard drums, chants, cheers, and laughs — the March to Defend Health Care had begun! The throng of activists slowly made its way to Love Park where it settled in for hours of speeches advocating universal health care. Many folks highlighted the urgent need for the eradication of the American HMO-market driven system of commodified health care. I departed the scene just before Ralph Nader ascended the podium and delivered what I'm sure was an eloquent attack on the big businesses that decide our health services (me being the expert journalist I am had no idea he was speaking that day).

The next day, I arrived disgustingly late for what organizers boasted was the biggest demonstration of the week, the Unity 2000 march. I came upon the scene in the afternoon as the sun beat down mercilessly (I have the charred skin to prove the solar wrath) to behold a scene more akin to a festival than an angry protest. Speakers, several floats, people in costumes, Indian and ethnic dancers, a pro-vegetarian PETA person in a pig outfit (which made me sweat just thinking about being cooped up in such garb all day), and street theater provided the diverse crowds with intelligent and informative entertainment. Unity 2000 offered a grab bag of assorted political flavors. Socialists, communists, environmentalists, libertarians, vegetarians, anarchists and some of those God Squaders filled JFK Boulevard from Logan Circle almost to the Art Museum (remember that scene in the flick Rocky where Sly triumphantly ascends those steps?).

Monday, July 31, was the day of the March for Economic and Human Rights, sponsored by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU), a group who had been holding regular "reality tours" to show

the Philly beyond the Liberty Bell and Constitution Hall. KWRU also erected Bushville, a tent city built on a vacant lot to illustrate the homeless blight on the supposed nation of prosperity (As KWRU points out, there are 40,000 empty buildings in Philly and 20,000 homeless people). Unlike the previous weekend's major marches, the KWRU-led march did not receive a permit from the city. They chose to walk anyway.

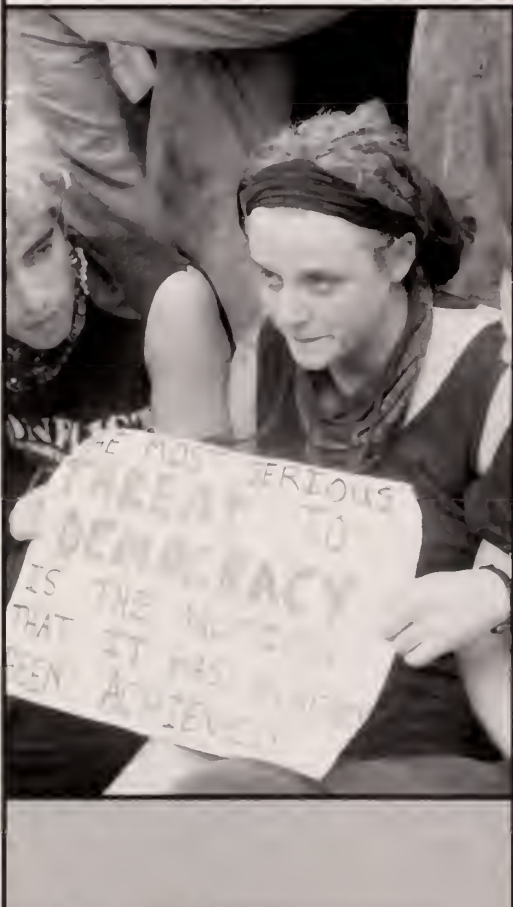
My partner and I rose from the depths of the public transit system to see a massive group swelling to the south of City Hall. We walked over, past a row of Wawa (a regional convenient store chain) concession stands, and joined the group, just beginning their procession down Broad Street, to as close to the FU Center as the cops would allow (The Convention was held at the First Union Center, formerly the Core States Bank Center, not to be confused with the PNC Bank Arts Center in NJ). The air was thick with humidity and tense with uncertainty. When would the cops arrest us all as they had initially threatened? I looked at both sides of the street, Philly's center city artery, to see that the skyscrapers had belched their white-collar contents. They stared at us in awe, horror, and amusement. They had never witnessed so much excitement, so much compassion, so much life. The cops and the media swarmed like mosquitoes. Some quipped, not too facetiously, that there were more media people than there were cops.

Among the more surreal moments was the random sighting of the Republicans' own Newt Gingrich. The fallen Contractor with America inexplicably chose to catch a bite to eat at a White Castle Church's Chicken on Catherine Street (not in the posh, upper class area of Broad Street). Upon sight, marchers and media people flocked to Newt, who ran like terrified prey. He reportedly tried in vain to hide behind a dumpster and was saved only by the police. What Newt was thinking venturing into the direct path of a march which saw Newtie as everything it despised, we can only guess.

After three hours, the march finally reached a firm police blockade, effectively diverting us to FDR Park, the only officially sanctioned public area for demonstrating the Convention (though it seems to be miles from the FU Center). Some brave few attempted to cross the police line, but most chose to follow the KWRU's lead and not raise trouble with the law. I had four miles and three hours beneath a pummeling mid-summer sun had any effect whatsoever in raising the consciousness of the city to the very real problems of economic inequality? As far as I could tell, most people standing on the sidewalk watching us were not hostile (besides that girl with the "Fuck the Protestors" sign and the guy who yelled and threw a crumpled piece of paper at us). The ensuing media portrayal was typically bland, with a lot of space given to frustrated commuters who had to deal with traffic tie-ups. But the march had gone on, with no blessing from the city and thousands ready to risk arrest to defy the Republicans and address serious issues.

Up until Monday night, the police, the mayor, and the media couldn't stop patting themselves on the back for averting serious incident. They conceded that these radicals actually conducted themselves in a peaceful, damn near cordial manner.

And then came Tuesday afternoon. August 1 was promised to be a day of direct action against the criminal injustice system. But no one knew when nor where the action would strike.





I left work at 5 p.m., wandering out onto Broad Street to a screaming chorus of sirens and helicopters. I

looked to the north to see a sea of flashing lights and shadowy figures. I hopped in my car and flipped on the radio. "And here we are on the scene following a group of anarchists. They're running through the street, knocking over dumpsters, smashing car windows, spray-painting police cruisers," a very frightened newscaster rapidly chirped. Other newspeople announced that the protestors had attacked! They staged sit-downs on Spruce and Broad (preceded by a game of all-American anarchist soccer in the middle of the normally busy street), blocked the ramp at 676 and 8th Street — it sounded like the Revolution really was happening!

I went to pick up my partner at the local anarchist bookstore radical hangout, Wooden Shoe Books. As I got within a block of the store, I noticed seven or so cops across the street at one corner, another seven or so at another corner — all staring down the Wooden Shoe. I walked past their cold, questioning gazes and went inside. What, we wondered inside, did they think we were brewing up bombs in the basement?

What followed was a media maelstrom of misinformation. They reported on the disturbing raid of the Ministry of Puppetganda at 41st and Haverford in West Philly, but repeated the police lines word for word. Two City Councilmen criticized the police action, yet the media chose to fan the flames of the police-ignited witch-hunt. They said the warehouse was the center for the chaos erupting on city streets, that protestors stored equipment for mass disruption and destruction (such as PVC pipes, chicken wire, and gasp! —puppets). Seventy people were arrested. The town came forth to defend the puppet-makers and condemn the police (as of this writing, those protestors remain behind bars).

The only counterpoint to the ensuing media whitewash was the Independent Media Center. From 13th and Locust, the IMC broadcasted nightly to whomever got their Public Access program. They also published *Unconvention*, the only radical daily in the country during this week. No other news outlet displayed video or images of police beating on non-violent protestors and indiscriminate harassment and arrest of people who had absolutely nothing to do with the actions. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *City Paper*, *The Metro*, local NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox affiliates — all delivered a rousing eulogy for our heroes, the police. You'd think the cops were angels, martyrs, Rambo, George Washington and GI Joe wrapped into one Real American Hero.

Demonstrations and rallies went on as scheduled in the days following the Tuesday Revolution. Wednesday saw women's rights and globalization as the issues of action for the day, with protests outside the Citicorp Building and on Broad Street for women's rights to do with their bodies as they wish. But a lot of attention went towards the arrested protestors' new fight behind bars. As expected, reports of abuse trickled out. They contended that the cops refused their rights to a lawyer. They ignored their pleading for medical attention (some had AIDS, epilepsy, diabetes). Reports of activists being denied water, food, as well as beatings, verbal and even sexual abuse also surfaced. Officials slowed down arraignments. Some argue that this reac-

tion stems from the police's own class bias against what they perceive as a "white, college-age, rich kid" outburst. What do they have to complain about? critics of this new movement contend.

And of course there is the not-so minor issue of the bails. Most protestors charged with misdemeanors saw fines of \$15,000 to \$30,000. Some were assaulted with bails in the neighborhood of \$450,000, and two faced \$1,000,000 bonds (meaning that amount must be paid in full for them to see release). Many imprisoned activists practiced jail solidarity, refusing to give their names and going on a hunger strike to demand bails more commensurate with the "crimes" and to demand medical attention. Not even a week after the initial bail sentencing, many prominent citizens chastised District Attorney Lynn Abraham and her cohorts for what they considered unconstitutionally high bails. Michael Churchill of the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia said, "The deliberate use of high bail and detention ... is far from necessary to maintain order and crosses the line into repression."

Many see the city's fanatical response to the non-violent demonstrations, through singling out specific activists and punishing them severely with ludicrously high bails, as a foreboding new trend in state-sponsored repression. Amy Kwasnicki of PDAG said in a *City Paper* article, "This isn't about protests. It is the beginning of a large-scale internal war on activism." Paul Hetzner, an attorney defending some of the activists, opined, "What does it say about a democratic system when people out there exercising their constitutional right to dissent need to be watched and treated like enemies of the state?"

Many will still spit, "those protestors didn't stand for anything," or they are "rebels without a clue." But some will realize that there must be some reason why the police will use extreme measures to destroy and silence dissent. If the activists don't stand for issues as supposedly important as those of the social movements of the '60s (sarcasm most definitely intended), then why are the police so frightened? Why did the media go to great lengths to belittle demonstrators and say, "Philadelphia police have shown how to do it right" in extolling their tactics in handling demonstrators? Never before has the state witnessed such a pervasive and diverse coalition of forces committed to taking the power back, be they environmentalists, human rights activists, academics or the concerned neighbor next door. Despite Mayor John Street and Police Commissioner Timoney's call for a federal investigation into this "criminal conspiracy," and their determination to punish and discourage activists, a movement of resistance to the corporate-encrusted world they represent cannot be suppressed. ☿



I Went to the DNC and All I Got Was A Lousy Sunburn.

Words and photos Matt Average



What the media, local government and police were playing up as a week of potential street violence and chaos (along with planting a rumor of terrorists poised to unleash anthrax on the populace), in the end turned out to be four days allowing the LAPD to display their numerous crowd control gadgets and sheer numbers of force.

Why not? There was no real unity among the protest groups. Every group seemed to be there for its own cause, and most unrelated to what the marches were set up against. You had people wanting to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, people from Hollywood waving banners that asked to keep work in L.A. and not in Canada, the Green Party, pro-lifers, pro-choice people, and on and on. On top of all that, most people seemed bored, and the heat was unforgiving.

There were over 5,000 police officers assigned to patrol downtown Los Angeles on foot, car, bicycle, motorcycle, helicopter, and let's not forget the plain-clothes cops infiltrating the various protest groups.

On the first day of street actions, August 14, riot cops were posted on practically every corner. They seemed to continually grow in numbers as we made our way from Staples Center to the "designated protest area," Pershing Square. It's like seeing a cockroach in your apartment — you see one and more are on their way.

As the marchers turned the corner of Flower and Sixth Street, headed towards Pershing Square, the riot cops slowed down alongside the Black Bloc (which resembled more a rectangle than a block), and a standoff began. The crowd started chanting "Who's streets? Our streets!" as the police issued warnings through their bullhorn to move along or arrests would be made. Chants and warnings went back and forth for several minutes.

Then one cop began swinging his baton at a line of demonstrators before fellow officers rushed over to calm him down. It was strange to see, for once, cops trying to keep their cool. The amount of media there with cameras trained on them could have had something to do with it.

As I'm taking photos, I hear people yell, and bodies begin to whiz by and slam into me. I look up and see people scatter. I follow suit.

One block later, the stand off resumes — although this was a much smaller group. People break and run again before finally reaching the "designated protest area," which is blocks and blocks away from Staples Center. Marchers stand around to hear various speeches and chants to lull them to sleep in the relentless summer heat.

Shortly after 2 p.m. the March Against the WTO begins its tour of "corporate shame." The crowd is led along to the various corporate entities throughout downtown making noise as we stop off at places like Citibank, British Petroleum, Arco, and the like.

Rumors begin to circulate that Rage Against



The Machine are playing a free show outside the Staples Center later that evening. Not a fan of the band and drained from the heat I opt to go home (something doesn't jive when you shout down corporations then turn around and rock out to corporate bands like RATM).

That night I turn on the 11 o'clock news to scenes of police firing tear gas and rubber bullets in to the crowd.

Tuesday morning I'm on the 10 Santa Monica Freeway bus headed back to downtown. A prison bus passes by in the same direction.

Expecting to see more riot police and angry protesters seeking revenge from the night before I'm greeted to, pretty much, business as usual in the area. Where once stood groups of riot police now stands good looking people handing out promotional items like shampoo and chewing gum. Even the Spicardmint Rhino, a local strip club, has a booth set up across the street from Staples Center.

The "designated protest pit" in front of Staples is largely populated with Right-To-Lifers, and Kate Bush blaring over the PA system. I look upon it as psychic warfare and begin heading towards Pershing Square. Along the way I take note of the empty streets and over hear two office workers talking, "I think the protests are over."

Pershing Square is empty except for a few homeless folk. I head back to Staples, see some crusties milling around and keep on walking. I drop in at the Shadow Convention, being held at the Patriotic Hall, two blocks south of Staples. The place is packed, and in the lobby they have set up monitors for those who can't make it into the auditorium. On screen is a feed of Susan Sarandon talking about the death penalty. She shouldn't be a public speaker. I catch the bus back home.

I find out later that somewhere downtown 45 animal rights activists were arrested after entering two fur stores, and that evening 50 to 70 people participating in Critical Mass were nabbed.

On Wednesday two separate demos against the police are held in different parts of the city. The first one is at the Ramparts station, north of downtown. For over a year the local press has been covering the numerous scandals and cover ups being exposed of the LAPD who work out of there. Gang members have been framed, drugs confiscated disappearing, etc. The protest is apparently without a license, and 37 people are arrested.

At noon marchers gather in Pershing Square in a march to Parker Center (LAPD HQ).

As they make their way to the police station there are even more riot cops and media than

ever before running alongside the growing numbers of people in the street. Marchers hold up signs of friends and relatives killed by the police, and one sign pathetically begs "Just Stop Killing People".

Arriving at Parker Center we see riot cops posted out front of the station and a wall of media separating them from the demonstrators.

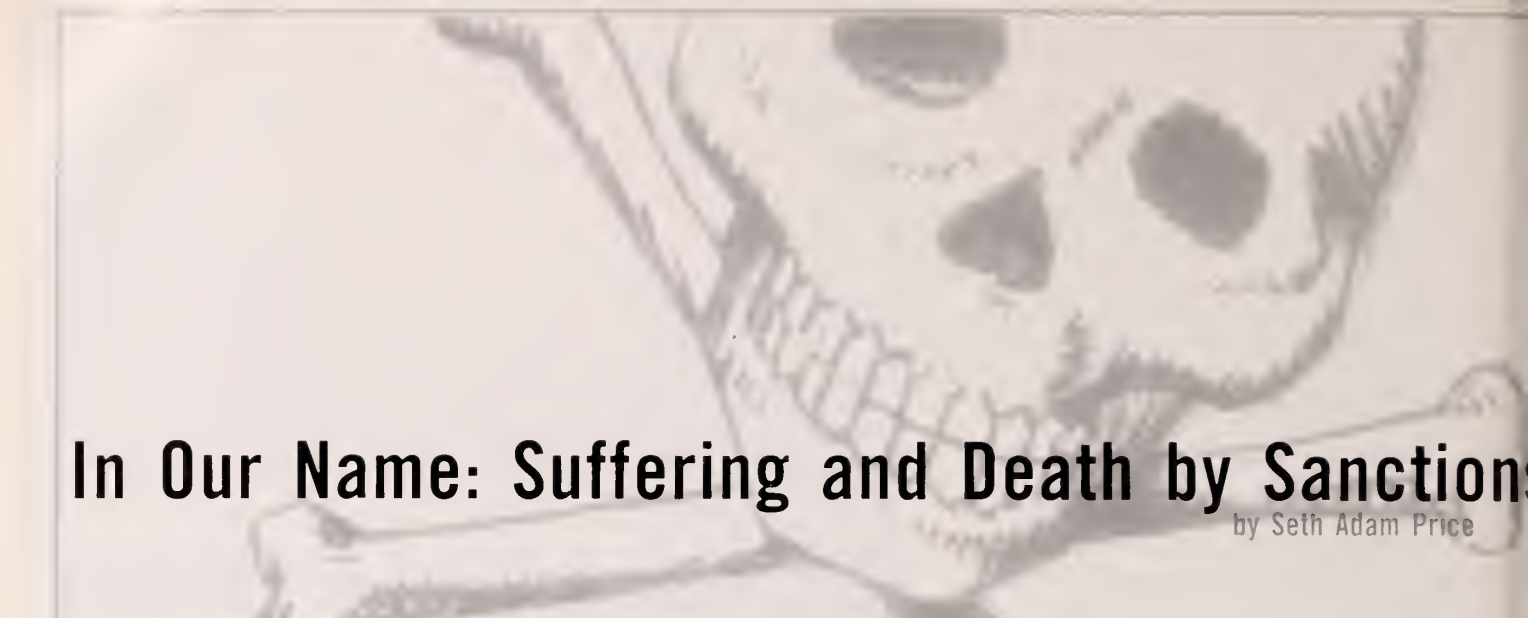
Some people perform street theater, such as a dominatrix and Governor Gray Davis on prison spending, and some folks ehanted. The Black Block set an American flag on fire and read off a diatribe to a group of photographers before beating on a bucket and waving a black flag.

People began to leave, and I head over the Shadow Convention with the hopes of seeing Johnny Rotten speak on youth culture and music.

Rotten is a no show, and instead I see KRS-One telling the crowd that every time you buy a Rage Against the Machine record you're voting against corporations. Ycah, okay.

As I sit there in my chair, catching the occasional cool breeze I take note of my sore muscles and a body that hasn't felt this tired in a long time. ☿





In Our Name: Suffering and Death by Sanction

by Seth Adam Price

On a chilly March evening at the rather conservative Massachusetts State College, I attend a forum. The evening's topic concerned the continuing United States United Nations economic blockade of Iraq. A trade union organizer who was part of the Iraq Sanctions Challenge III delegation had been invited by me to address the blockade's effect on both Iraq's people and its infrastructure.

As a first year transfer undergraduate at Bridgewater State College (Bridgewater, MA), I realized that its past history is short on the radical and militant protests of colleges such as Kent State. However, in the aftermath of anti-WTO protests in Seattle last year, I began to feel the urge to change my words of outrage at US policy toward Iraq into much needed action. I was fortunate to discover the Iraq Sanctions Challenge web site (<http://www.isc-usa.org>).

In January, the ISC made its third journey to Iraq since the end of the Persian Gulf War; delivering much needed medicine and medical supplies to Iraq's hospitals, in deliberate defiance of US law and UN sanctions.

Ed Childs, an activist and union organizer from Somerville, Massachusetts, witnessed first hand what intensive bombing raids and 10 years of grinding economic sanctions have wrought in Iraq. Childs described Iraq as akin to the Warsaw Ghettos of Poland during World War II. He called on those in the audience to be in solidarity with the people of Iraq, and more importantly, he asked that we take our opposition to the sanctions to the streets and union halls where real change is made in the US.

IN DUBIOUS BATTLE

August 6, has come and gone in the United States. For many in the US this date marked the 45th anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. However, for those who gathered in Washington, D.C. and around the world, this date signified the 10th anniversary of a new weapon of mass destruction: the ongoing United Nations United States economic blockade regime against Iraq.

Can there be any justification for an economic boycott that has directly led to the deaths of over a million Iraqi civilians, over half of which were children? This genocidal and racist policy continues to exact a human toll that far surpasses the death and destruction inflicted upon Hiroshima.

According to the May 15, 2000 edition of *In These Times*, before the sanctions Iraq had one of the healthiest and best educated populations in the world. Iraq's child mortality rate was one of the lowest. UNICEF recently reported that Iraq's child mortality rate is now amongst the highest on earth.

On August 6, 1990, the United Nations Security Council, which is made up of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, and

Russia, passed a resolution mandating that importing and exporting of any goods to or from Iraq was to be prevented. The Bush Administration, rationalized these economic sanctions as a way to force Iraq to withdraw from its southern neighbor, Kuwait.

In the August 10, 2000 *Workers World Newspaper* Brian Becker's "Which Way For the Anti-Sanctions Movement" refutes the pretext used by the Bush Administration in 1990. "If the sanctions were meant only to drive Iraqi troops from Kuwait then why, nearly a decade after the Iraqis left, does the United States still impose 'the most complete embargo of any country in modern times', in the words of President Clinton's national security advisor Samuel Berger."

One answer propagated by the corporate-owned US news media and the faithful Machiavellian spokesmen in the US State Department is the supposed potential and capability of Iraq to make or accommodate "weapons of mass destruction."

A former US Marine and UNSCOM's Chief Inspector W. Scott Ritter, has gone on record in numerous interviews to explain that Iraq is "qualitatively disarmed." Moreover, Iraq does not currently possess the capability to use, launch, or deploy, chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons (*Voices in the Wilderness - Myths and Realities*).

While the US warlords were manufacturing yet another reason to bomb Iraq in late December 1998, Scott Ritter was being interviewed on the *NBC Today Show*. Ritter unmasked the lie that Iraq's people must be bombed and economically boycotted because their government is alleged to be building new "weapons of mass destruction." Ritter stated, "The US has perverted the UN weapons process by using it as a tool to justify military actions, falsely so ... The US was using the inspection process as a trigger for war."

The Bush and Clinton Administrations have a history of undermining not only UNSCOM (which is now called UNMOVIC), but also the UN as a neutral mediator between the US and Iraq. As permanent members of the UN Security Council, the US and England have used strong-arm tactics to hinder China, France, and Russia from challenging the legitimacy of the sanctions.

AN OLIVE BRANCH?

The United Nations Security Council in late 1999 passed Resolution 1284. This resolution appeared in the US media as offering Iraq an olive branch toward lifting the sanctions completely.

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz met with the Iraq Sanctions Challenge III delegation in Baghdad early this year. Aziz, as reported in the February 10, 2000 *Workers World Newspaper* ("US Strategy Vs Iraq and UNSC Resolution 1284") criticized *The New York Times* and CBS

n Iraq



This month, U.S. policy will kill 4,500 Iraqi children under the age of 5, according to United Nations studies, just as it did last month and the month before that all the way back to 1991.

News for reporting that "sanctions would be suspended if Iraq cooperates. But Iraq has cooperated for many years, from '91-'98, and got as a reward bombs and missiles."

Aziz went on to say that under Resolution 1284 Iraq would have to prove that no "weapons of mass destruction," nor the capacity to make, them exists. According to former US Attorney General and founder of the International Action Center, Ramsey Clark, "It's impossible to prove a negative, to prove that no weapons exist in an area as large as Iraq." This, according to Clark, is the US' ulterior motive, "To set conditions that cannot be met, thus allowing the sanctions to continue without limit."

OIL FOR FOOD PROGRAM

US Representative Barney Frank (D-Massachusetts), replying to my letter opposing sanctions, defended his support for them on the grounds that the humanitarian crisis in Iraq today is being alleviated by the UN's Oil-for-Food Program. Many supporters of the sanctions have cited Oil-for-Food as their reason for remaining in lock-step agreement with President Clinton, Secretary of State Madeline Albright, Secretary Of Defense James Cohen, and US National Security Advisor Samuel Berger.

Those who have placed the blame for continued economic hardship and human suffering at the doorstep of the Iraqi leadership would be wise to understand that the UN Oil-for-Food Program has inherent shortcomings.

Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair enumerated US manipulation of Oil-for-Food in their online newsletter *Counterpunch*. Under Oil-for-Food, UNSC Resolution 986, Iraq is allowed to sell a certain amount of oil for purchasing badly needed commodities. According to *Counterpunch*, proceeds made from oil sales are divided up and given to those who have claims on Iraq, such as the Kuwaitis, and to cover the cost of the UN effort in Iraq.

Iraq has to place an order before a UN special committee in charge of approving or rejecting the contracts. While the US State Department has reported that over 70 percent of contracts submitted have been approved; it should be noted that the ratio of approved/disapproved contracts doesn't paint the entire picture.¹

Items approved for purchase may be useless without their complementary parts. A prime example of this reported in *Counterpunch*, "The Iraqi Foreign Ministry of Health has ordered \$25 million worth of dentist chairs, said order being approved by the UN 661 Committee — except for the compressors, without which the chairs are useless."

Iraq's poor distribution of food and medical supplies is primarily a by-product of the intensive bombing of its infrastructure. Iraq's infra-

structure was completely destroyed by bombing raids during the 1991 Gulf War — this includes communication centers, as well as water purification, electricity, and warehousing facilities. Destruction of water purification facilities has directly affected the rural population of Iraq. This in turn causes poor nutritional status for those Iraqi children exposed to contaminated water.¹¹

Why is Oil-for-Food unable to stem the humanitarian disaster in Iraq today? An FAO WFP 1997 report provides pertinent insight: "Before the Gulf War, food availability was quite adequate. A return to these levels (of food availability before 1990) cannot be expected under present conditions."¹⁰

TO DE-LINK OR NOT TO DE-LINK, THAT IS THE QUESTION

A petition circulated in the US House of Representatives called on President Clinton to support the de-linking of military and economic sanctions.

Sarah Flounders (co-director of the International Action Center) wrote a pamphlet arguing that the slogan of de-linking sanctions on Iraq is a wolf in sheep's clothing (available at

Her main argument is Iraq's sovereign right to defend itself against the US and England. According to Flounders, supporting military sanctions is tantamount to taking the side of the aggressor (England and the US) against the victim (Iraq). Flounders goes on to say that this tactic portrays Iraq as the antagonist, whereas it's the US and England who've acted violently by bombing Iraq.

Perhaps a primary rallying cry for the anti-sanctions movement instead of "Military sanctions, not economic sanctions," should be "Stop the sanctions — stop the bombings."

Another shortcoming of de-linking sanctions is the opportunity the US would have to claim that certain items have military applications (i.e. "dual use"). Items labeled "dual use" in the past are as follows: x-ray machines, enriched milk powder, and ambulances. For a complete list go to the Iraq Action Center's web site at

WE CAN'T BE NEUTRAL ON THIS MOVING TRAIN

A just cause from the depths of a cave can defeat an entire army
— Jose Martí

Lyrics to Bruce Springsteen's "Jungleland" have been playing over and over again in my head as I've pondered how I can encourage readers to take a stand against the sanctions. The final lines of the song cut to the case, speaking to the hearts of those who may still be on the fence.



Since the end of the Gulf War, more than a million Iraqis have died as a direct result of the UN sanctions on Iraq.

*Outside the street is on fire
In a real death's waltz*

In the now infamous 1996 interview with CBS 60 Minutes, US Secretary of State Madeline Albright responded to the death of a half a million Iraqis in a way that would have brought a smile to the lips of sycophant 16th century political philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli. Albright's callous response, "Well, this is the price we're willing to pay."

Between what's flesh and what's fantasy

Stressing Albright's use of the word WE, is germane here. I gather when she says WE, it's meant to include all citizens of the US, not just high ranking cabinet members of the Clinton Administration. Therefore, it should be obvious that this genocide being perpetrated in our name makes us bound by obligation to counter Albright's hypocrisy.

*And the poets down here
Don't write nothing at all
They just stand back and let it all be*

Change of policy will not arrive by electing either Gore or Bush as the next US President. No, real change will happen when WE — the real WE — act against the inhumanity of our leaders and in solidarity with the people of Iraq. We can make our stand!

*And in the quick of the night
They reach for their moment
And try to make an honest stand...* ♀

Endnotes

This essay wouldn't have been possible without Ed Childs and Frank Neisser from the International Action Center and Kathy Kelly of Voices in the Wilderness. You are the missing foot soldiers in this struggle. Your efforts have inspired others to take on this cause. As Che Guevara would say, "¡ENCEREMOS!" We will win, for the Iraqi people deserve nothing less!

♂ Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, "Albright's Tiny Collins," *Counterpunch* 16-30 September 1999

♀ Sarah Sloan, 'Challenge to Genocide: Let Iraq Live, The Perpetual Sanctions Machine - Too Little Too Late: Oil for Food,' p. 52.

♂ FAO WFP Food Supply and Nutrition Assessment Mission to Iraq, 3 October 1997, section 1, p. 1

Items Banned by the Sanctions

agricultural pesticides	notebooks
all electrical equipment	nylon cloth for filtering flour
all other building materials	other adult clothes
ambulances	oxygen tents
baby food	paper
badminton rackets	pencil sharpeners
bandages	pencils
blankets	ping-pong balls
boots	polyester & acrylic yarn
cannulas for intravenous drips	rice
catheters for babies	rubber tubes
children's bicycles	school books
children's clothes	school handicraft equipment
chlorine and other water	shampoo
purification chemicals	shirts
cleaning agents	shoe laces
cobalt sources for X-ray	shroud material
machines	soap
deodorants	sanitary towels
dialysis equipment	specific granite shipments
disposable surgical gloves	specific umbilical catheters
drugs for angina	steel plate stethoscopes
ECG monitors	suction catheters for blockages
erasers	surgical instruments
glue for textbooks	textile plant equipment
incubators	thread for children's clothes
leather material for shoes	tissues
lipsticks	toilet paper
medical gauze	tooth brushes
medical journals	toothpaste
medical swabs	various other foodstuffs
medical syringes	wool felt for thermal insulation
medication for epilepsy	X-ray equipment
nail polish	X-ray film
nasogastric tubes	

Sanctions list and headline quotes courtesy of
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Clinton Must Make Demands of Fujimori

by Craig Butler

The mainstream American media finally, belatedly, took note of the authoritarian tactics of Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori earlier this year. His rigging of the Presidential elections in the spring was so blatant that even the U.S. Government was forced to criticize the process and call for corrective action.

Fujimori's anti-democratic actions extend far beyond the falsification of election returns. For example, Peru's constitution specifically prohibits a Presidential candidate from seeking a third consecutive term, as Fujimori did this year. His solution to this problem? Simple — appoint judges who would reinterpret the constitution and declare that this prohibition does not apply in Fujimori's case.

The Peruvian media has given the President very little to worry about, as the majority of the media is essentially government-controlled. Those who are independent and do criticize the government frequently pay a price, as Baruch Ivcher discovered when he was branded a criminal and forced into exile for his uncomplimentary reports.

Other people have not been so fortunate as to escape, including one American citizen. Lori Berenson, a journalist and native of New York, was in Lima in 1995, researching stories on poverty in Peru for *Modern Times* and *Third World Viewpoints*. On November 30, after interviewing members of Congress, Lori was riding a bus when she was suddenly confronted by government officials and told she was being placed under arrest. The charge against her was treason.

The fact that the charge of "treason" cannot be applied to someone who is not a citizen of the arresting country was just the beginning of the "irregularities" which were rampant during Lori's trial — and which are all too typical of the system of "justice" practiced by Alberto Fujimori. For example, during her questioning, Lori was allowed physical access to counsel, but her lawyer was not permitted to provide guidance or do anything other than translate the questions from Spanish to English, if necessary. And to prepare for the case, Lori's lawyer was given less than two hours to sort through 2000 un-indexed pages of documents, the vast majority of which concerned cases other than Lori's.

The government "explained" the charge of treason by claiming Lori was a terrorist with the guerrilla Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA). Before Fujimori, terrorist activity had been a tremendous problem in Peru. Fujimori was elected largely on his promise to do something about it. His solution was to enact a series of laws that give the government the power to abrogate the rights of ordinary citizens in its efforts to root out terrorists. As a result, people accused of terrorism — many of whom have done nothing more than disagree with official policy — are typically tried in a military rather than civilian court. This was the case with Lori.

When the trial commenced, it was presided over by a "hooded" (and therefore anonymous) judge. This has become standard practice in Peruvian military trials. The justification is that judges in terrorism cases are subject to threats and possible reprisals, possibly a legitimate concern. However, with the identity of the judge unknown, it is impossible to ascertain what qualifications he may have for presiding over a trial. Indeed, it is suspected that most such judges are merely officers in the military with little or no legal background. Certainly no self-respecting magistrate would validate these kinds of proceedings.

The trial was over quickly (in this case after less than two hours), another hallmark of Fujimori's system of justice. This is because the presentation of "evidence" is entirely one sided. Lori was not allowed to

call any witnesses on her own behalf. She was not even allowed to cross-examine the witnesses called against her or to call into question the "evidence" against her (among this evidence was an allegation that Lori participated in a firefight between the MRTA and Peruvian police, an event which occurred *after* Lori was arrested and securely in jail).

Found guilty, not just of being a terrorist but, incredibly, of being one of the masterminds behind the MRTA, Lori was sentenced to life imprisonment. Originally confined to Yanamayo Prison, high in the Andes Mountains, Lori was eventually moved to Socabaya Prison after her health showed a marked deterioration due to the extreme elevation of the first prison. Neither prison is exactly a country club, with small, cramped cells, inadequate food supplies, and no heat. (That last factor is especially important in the winter, when the temperature in the cells rarely gets above freezing. One thin blanket does not provide much protection against the cold and drafts.)

Lori has been beset with physical ailments, including respiratory and circulatory problems. Her hands are swollen and purple (as are other parts of her body) and physical activity is painful. For some time after her transfer to Socabaya, she was kept in isolation and not allowed contact with other prisoners. She now enjoys one hour a day of "social" contact, although this often involves fending off threats and harassment from other prisoners. It is surmised that, because of her special status — i.e., a symbol of Fujimori's willingness to stand up to "Yankees" — prisoners can curry favor with prison officials by behaving antagonistically toward Lori. Therefore, while most treat her in a friendly or at least civil manner, there are a number who behave quite antagonistically.

That Lori has been subjected to this punishment is disgraceful. What is even more disgraceful, however, is that President Clinton has refused to act to secure her release, despite a legal obligation to do so.

Under federal law (22 U.S. Code, Section 1732), "whenever it is made known to the President that any citizen of the U.S. has been unjustly deprived of his liberty by ... any foreign government, it shall be the duty of the President ... (to) use such means, not amounting to acts of war ... to obtain or effectuate (his) release."

Clearly, Lori is being illegally imprisoned. The charge of treason, as stated before, is inappropriate. The "trial" she underwent was a travesty of the term, as human rights monitors such as Amnesty International, have affirmed. The U.N. has even stated that Lori has been denied her liberty "arbitrarily" and found Peru in violation of international law.

And the President is well aware of her situation. Thousands of citizens have contacted the President about her case. Hundreds of Congressional Representatives and Senators, led by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, have expressed their support for Lori to President Clinton and the State Department. And Lori's parents have, on numerous occasions, requested a meeting with the President to plead their daughter's case.

Yet Clinton has refused to do as the law requires. He has declined to contact President Fujimori and demand that Lori Berenson be released and returned to the United States. He has rejected calls upon his office to tie continued non-humanitarian aid to Peru to a reform of its current repressive practices in general and to the release of Lori specifically.

Exactly why he has done this is a matter of conjecture. There are some "covert" possibilities. For example, Vladimiro Montesinos, a high-ranking confidante of Fujimori's, has been linked to our CIA, suggesting that Montesinos may be involved in Clinton's inaction. It's also pos-

Clinton has refused to do as the law requires. He has declined to contact President Fujimori and demand that Lori Berenson be released and returned to the United States. He has rejected calls upon his office to tie continued non-humanitarian aid to Peru to a reform of its current repressive practices in general and to the release of Lori specifically.

... Clinton does not want to get involved in something that his enemies could distort to his claim. Because of the complexity of this case, it is extremely vulnerable to "sound bite" journalism. "Clinton Frees Convicted Terrorist" is the kind of headline that certain publications would trumpet. But considering the President's uncanny ability to "spin" the news, this is really no excuse for his refusal to do what is morally right.

Probably the most likely explanation is that America has touted Peru as an example of the kind of political (and economic) "stability" that we support. Unfortunately, as has so often been the case, our leaders seem willing to support "stability" at the cost of democracy.

There is reason for hope. The loss of esteem that Peru suffered after the recent election could conceivably work to Lori's benefit. Just as this issue went to press, it was announced that the Peruvian military had voided Lori's sentence and that she would be granted a new trial in civilian court.

However, there is no guarantee that a new trial would produce a fair verdict. Fujimori's control of the media has insured that most Peruvians have had the image of Lori as a convicted terrorist mastermind emblazoned on their consciousness. In addition, this year's U.S. State Department Human Rights Report notes that "Proceedings ... for terrorism in civilian courts do not meet internationally accepted standards of openness, fairness and due process." Under the circumstances, Clinton should push for Lori's return to the U.S. and not be satisfied with what will likely be another trial in name only. He should make Lori's release part of a demand for wide-ranging reforms that would allow Fujimori to atone for the scandal created by his abuse of the electoral process. Many observers believe this will indeed be Fujimori's last term and that he may be willing to use Lori's release as a means of mitigating other U.S. demands.

Whether Clinton or his successor will act or not depends entirely upon pressure being brought to bear upon him. I urge you to write President Clinton today and request that he insist upon democratic reforms in Peru, beginning with the immediate release and return of Lori Berenson. Contact your representative and Senators and urge them to do the same. And bring the issue up in your local paper.

Lori has said, "to be silent in the face of injustice is to be an accomplice to evil." Don't be silent. Use your voice. Now. ☐

A Big Piece Is Missing

We have been forced into binarisms. Either we are progressive/pro-Arab/pro-Palestinian and thus in favor of giving up the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights; or we are racist/anti-Arab/anti-Palestinian and in favor of keeping all or part of this land.

In all the analyses I have heard, from the so-called Left and Right, the hawks and the doves, there is a poignant lack of awareness of the reality of Jews indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (Mizrahim). As if the only refugees have been Arab. As if the only Jews have been Northern European (Ashkeanzim). As if "Jewish" and "Middle Eastern" identities diametrically are opposed. And ironically enough, although not surprisingly, I have found Arab analyses of the situation to be as Euro-centric as the Jewish and general world community's analyses.

I say we put *all* cards on the table. I say we talk about *all* the Arab-Jewish Arab-Israeli points of connection and oppression - in both directions - and only then begin thinking of how to solve the problems in the Middle East. Without looking at the full picture, I find we do not have integrity in addressing Arab-Israel relations; and I find that racist and anti-Jewish assumptions and attitudes are woven into the lens through which we look at issues in the Middle East.

Germany has been held accountable for the Holocaust. The country has been publicly shamed throughout the world. It has made compensation payments to families of Holocaust victims and to the State of Israel. Israel's relationship with Germany has been framed with a backdrop of poignant consciousness of German atrocities. People throughout the world have at least a context for understanding, if not ample compassion, for Jews who have difficulty hearing the German language or buying German products. On a daily basis in the Jewish world, we are reminded of the Holocaust: "We will not forget."

To the contrary, the Arab states literally have gotten away with murder. How many people know of the daily terror Jews faced in Iraq or Syria? How many people know that Arab countries such as Morocco invited Nazis to exterminate its Jewish communities - communities that had been there 1,000-1,500 years prior to the Arab Muslim invasion of the region? How many people know about the hundreds of miles of Jewish land and billions of dollars of Jewish property that were confiscated and nationalized by various Arab governments? Moreover, how many people know that 1,000,000 Jewish refugees from Arab countries and their millions of children now make up the majority of the entire Israeli population? How many people care?

I believe anyone in the Middle East peace movement would find it absurd to discuss Arab-Israel relations without inviting Palestinians to the table. Yet I consistently have found Mizrahim absent from such discussions. I also believe anyone in the peace movement would find it unthinkable to ask Palestinians at the table to be silent about the oppression their families have suffered at the hands of Israel. Yet I have found

n This "Peace"

by Loolwa Khazzoom



Mizrahim unfailingly silenced by these same people, when trying to talk about the oppression our families faced at the hands of Arab governments. This silencing, I have found, is rooted in a complex mixture of and relationship between racism and Jew-hatred.

Arab governments and international Arab community leaders publicly have spoken of Jews as if all Jews are European; and they have spoken about Israel as if it were a European state colonializing third-world people. In fact, as I mentioned before, the majority of Israel's population is Mizrahi, indigenous to the region and never having left it. More specifically, they are Jewish refugees from Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, and other countries under Arab control. They were forced to flee their homes of 3,000 years when Arab states either issued expulsion orders or otherwise forced them to leave, through intolerable conditions of oppression.

I find that Arab dismissal of the Mizrahi experience stems from anti-Jewish sentiment that existed far before the creation of the State of Israel. If hostility towards Israel purely was because of injustices the state inflicted on Arabs, Arab leaders could speak about those injustices without needing to dismiss or trying to erase the Mizrahi reality. The two could exist side by side. And of course, they should.

But the dismissal is a way of taking even more from Mizrahim. On the materialistic level alone, it is a way of avoiding having to compensate Mizrahim for confiscating and nationalizing billions of dollars worth of communal and personal property. It otherwise is an opportunistic means of escaping accountability for the many injustices inflicted on these Jews, by reframing Arab-Jewish history so the world sees Arabs as third-world victims and Jews as white European oppressors.

Ironically enough, the State of Israel and the international Jewish community have helped foster this perception, as they too have presented all Jews as being white Europeans. Even during the Gulf War, when Iraqi missiles fell predominantly on Ramat Gan, an Iraqi Jewish suburb of Tel Aviv, we did not hear the Iraqi-Israelis speak of Iraq destroying their homes twice in one lifetime; rather, we heard European-Israelis saying how the bombing reminded them of the Holocaust.

Whereas I find Arab dismissal of Mizrahi reality stemming from anti-Jewish sentiment, I find Ashkenazi dismissal of Mizrahi reality stemming from racist sentiment. Mizrahi mistrust of Arab states has not been understood with compassion, the way Ashkenazi discomfort with Germany has been; and along those lines, Mizrahi hesitancy to give up Israeli land has not been explored and taken seriously. To the contrary,

the Mizrahi experience and political stand on Israel has been contextualized in a racist, patronizing light. Mizrahim, we have been told, are "hawks" because they are too primitive to understand the Western values of diplomacy, democracy, and peace.

I have seen and heard Ashkenazim state this message over and over again in international media; literature and forums on Arab-Israel relations; and university classrooms. In fact, it is almost exclusively in

this context that I ever have heard about Mizrahim in non-Mizrahi circles. When individuals view the Mizrahi experience in such a contemptuous way, I find it impossible to believe they have true respect and value for the Arab experience. For that which they intrinsically hate about Mizrahim, our Middle Easternness, is specifically that which Arabs share with us. How can someone who is truly so pro-Arab simultaneously be so hostile towards Mizrahim?

For a few years, I was baffled by that question. On a related note, I did not understand why a number of Jewish organizations have helped Arab causes while ignoring altogether or giving substantially less support to Mizrahi causes. A few months ago, I was thinking about these questions while also reflecting on Israel's desire to emulate Europe - to assimilate Jews, in other words, on a grand national scale. Suddenly, I realized these two separate thoughts were one; and I developed this theory:

Anti-Semitism is a term that specifically describes the anti-Jewish experience facing Ashkenazim. Persecution of German, Polish, and Russian Jews was based on the premise that these individuals were not real Europeans; they were so-called Semites - people of the Middle East and North Africa. And because of European racism, people of this region were seen as undesirable foreigners.

For centuries, Ashkenazim thus faced hostility, discrimination, and even death attributed to the Middle Eastern and North African roots of the Jewish people. For the sake of survival or status, depending on the time period, Ashkenazim therefore tried to assimilate into Christian Europe, by appearing as un-"Semitic" as possible.

As such, a cultural legacy was developed and passed on, where Ashkenazim shunned the Middle Eastern and North African roots of their heritage, in favor of a European identity. Despite the facts that Hebrew originated in the Middle East; that the first yeshivas (Jewish learning institutions) were in ancient Iraq; that the Jewish holiday of Purim celebrated the story of Iranian Jews; and that Passover told the

story of Egyptian Jews; despite the fact that Jews lived in the Middle East and North Africa for 4,000 years as opposed to the 1,000 or so Ashkenazim lived in Northern Europe; and despite the fact that the overall Jewish rhythm Ashkenazim lived was rooted in a Middle Eastern and North African tradition, Ashkenazim completely dissociated from a Middle Eastern and North African identity because it was not safe or simply because it was deemed undesirable and inferior.

And so we have a crisis in Jewish identity, where anti-Semitism is itself a form of racism, and where Ashkenazi detachment from the Middle Eastern and North African roots of Judaism is simultaneously a form of self-hatred and self-preservation.

Modern Zionist ideology is based on enabling Jews to finally throw off their Semitic stigma and be considered equals among the European nations. So imagine the horror Ashkenazim felt when hundreds of thousands of Mizrahi refugees poured into Israel, many looking like they had just stepped out of the bible. Mizrahim, I am convinced, pushed every proverbial button of terror that Ashkenazim had.

For this reason, I understand how Ashkenazi individuals and community leaders can simultaneously embrace Arab causes and run in the other direction from Mizrahi ones. Arab causes seem external, about someone else. Mizrahi causes, to the contrary, challenge the very foundations of Jewish identity and thus threaten to crumble a millennium worth of hard labor Ashkenazim have put into being viewed as true Europeans.

Of course, this behavior describes Ashkenazim who consciously ignore or resist the Mizrahi reality. There are Ashkenazim who embrace the Arab cause but not the Mizrahi one simply out of ignorance. Because the Arab and Jewish communities have portrayed Jews as white Europeans, many Ashkenazim have analyzed the situation through this lens; and they honorably have gone beyond their own interests to fight what seems to be a racist case of white Europeans colonializing and oppressing third world natives.

There also are Ashkenazim who are hostile both to Mizrahi and Arab causes. I feel this attitude comes from general racism towards non-Europeans. Ironically enough, with the establishment of the State of Israel, Ashkenazim for the first time could present themselves as true Europeans and be the ones in power over the non-Europeans - whether Mizrahi, Arab, or more recently, Ethiopian.

A woman I met at the first conference for Mizrahi and Ethiopian feminists (Israel, 1996) voiced her opinion of one more reason why Ashkenazim may support the Arab cause but not the Mizrahi one. Whereas the majority of Mizrahim live in Israel, she pointed out, the majority of Ashkenazim live in the Diaspora (outside Israel), where they get a lot of flack for Israel's actions. To relieve their own discomfort, they take whatever is the currently fashionable line on the Arab-Israel relationship. As the world community currently does not acknowledge the existence of Mizrahi reality yet sees Arab states and people as victims, many Ashkenazim will say the same not

out of deep concern for what is going on, but simply so they will not be hassled.

What about non-Jewish/non-Arab individuals? I feel anyone who is pro-Arab out of the positive spirit of defending justice will embrace the Mizrahi reality. After all, the two are not in competition; and in fact, there are a number of places where they overlap. To the contrary, I believe that individuals who are using the Arab cause as a cover for Jew-hatred will resist learning about the Mizrahi reality. I in fact have had this latter experience and see it as a good litmus test for finding out one's true intentions around the Arab-Israel issue.

Given the information most people have received about the Arab-Israel relationship, I can understand feeling anti-Israel. If I did not know what I do, I easily could be anti-Israel myself, perceiving a cut-and-dry situation of white Europeans yet again colonializing native people of color.

I feel it is imperative to learn about the Mizrahi experience and see it in its own context. Along these lines, I find it important to see in a compassionate light whatever Mizrahi mistrust there is of Arab states and people and to take seriously the experiences that led to this mistrust. For there to be healing in the Middle East, we must make room for everyone's experiences and feelings, so that we can have the full information and intelligence we need to move into a peaceful future.

Right now, I find there is no room for Mizrahim to voice our experience with, anger at, hurt from, or mistrust of Arabs. For many of us, when we have begun voicing our feelings, people have jumped down our throats, reciting to us the Palestinian cause. As if it could not exist side by side with the Mizrahi cause. As if there only was room for one. As if the pain of another person's broken leg meant you could not share the pain of your broken arm.

People have called us racist when we have spoken - a fact I find highly ironic, as I feel that perception in itself is Euro-centric. It can be very different, I believe, for an African-American to say, "I hate white

people" than for a white person to say, "I hate black people." In a racist society, the victims of racism have much reason to be angry at and hateful of the group that has been the oppressor. To the contrary, members of the oppressive group may feel hateful simply because of irrational feelings of superiority towards anyone not like them.

To view Mizrahi mistrust of or anger towards Arabs as being racist is to eradicate the Mizrahi experience of being the oppressed group in Arab countries. It is to see Mizrahim as analogous to white people and Arabs as analogous to African-Americans, instead of the

reverse. It is to clump Mizrahim together with Ashkenazim and once again to see all Jews of Israel as being European oppressors.

The Mizrahi experience of course varied from country to country, and not all Mizrahim share the same feelings or current political stand regarding Israel. But the majority of Mizrahim in Israel seem to be more conservative about giving up Israeli land. I happen to feel the same, and I have spoken with many Mizrahi-Israelis who feel this way;

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accordingly, I can share a few thoughts as to why:

Throughout the Arab world, Jews were treated as dhimmis - legally second-class, inferior people. Some telling visual examples include that Jews were not permitted to ride horses, because their heads would be higher than the heads of Muslims, and Jews could not build synagogues taller than mosques. Through legal restrictions, Islam and Muslims were made to be, literally and figuratively, always above Judaism and Jews.

Even in the mildest forms of discrimination, Jews were treated as subordinate and expendable and were given many obstacles to basic economic survival. The restrictions on Jewish freedom were demeaning and thus humiliating. The yellow badge - i.e., the yellow Star of David, a symbol associated exclusively with Nazi Germany - actually originated in the Middle East, where it was used to identify and single out Jews for a variety of discriminatory treatments.

Throughout the Arab world, governments did not grant Jews equal protection under the law. Governments not only condoned or ignored the terrorization of Jews; but they initiated such terrorization, as well. In countries such as Iraq and Syria, for example, government officials randomly banged on doors of Jewish homes, after which time nobody ever again saw the families inside. Gruesome torture of Jews also was common in such countries, after which victims either were murdered or returned alive yet permanently disabled or disfigured. Kidnapping and holding Jews for ransom was so prevalent that the Jewish communities had official, ongoing ransom funds. Jewish children going to school frequently just disappeared, without even making it to the ransom stage.

When we ourselves have not experienced or been exposed to a certain oppressive lifestyle, the weight and significance of its reality may not really register with us. Because of the invalidation and silencing of Mizrahi Jews, we have not been exposed to the personal stories of people who suffered through the discrimination and terror I have described. We have not been flooded with footage of the daily abuses they experienced. We have not witnessed the community when it flourished despite its obstacles, and we have not seen its destruction when everything was taken and nationalized by the Arab governments.

I was not of the generation that grew up in and was forced to flee from Iraq; but I have been impacted directly by many consequences of the fear and destruction the Jewish community faced there. Growing up, my sister and I were forbidden from making any sudden, banging noise. Whenever we forgot, my father was thrown into a fit of panic and terror, having a visceral reaction that an Arab official was at the door to come do God-knows-what to the family. My father also slept with his shoes near his bed for years of my life, unable to get over the sense of needing to run from an Arab mob at any time. I learned fear of walking past an uncovered window at night; my father passed it on from his childhood, where it apparently was unsafe for a Jew to be exposed in such a way.

I also grew up feeling my father's anger and resentment at Iraq for robbing his family of everything, making him have to start from scratch. Like all Iraqi Jews fleeing the country, he was allowed to bring only one suitcase on his exit. No significant amounts of money, mementos, or

religious ceremonial objects. Just the basics. He had to leave his life behind. Then at the airport, Arab officials broke open his and everyone else's suitcases, taking whatever they wanted from the minuscule amount the Jews were permitted to bring. They even took the glasses from my father's nose, until they realized his prescription did not suit them.

I grew up hearing about my great uncle who was tortured and murdered by Iraqi government officials for the crime of being a Jew. Arab men hung this Jewish man by his thumbs and left him there to die a slow, painful death. I heard about how my father grew up with pressure to be the absolute best in his class if he wanted a chance of getting into Iraqi university; only a handful of Jews were allowed each



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year.

And I grew up without things: We had only about 10 pictures total from Iraq. Everything else was destroyed. So I never really knew what my father or his family looked like before getting to Israel. I never got a sense of his home, neighborhood, school, or synagogue in Baghdad. I relied on my father's stories and my own visualization to create a sense of family history.

Though I grew up with Iraqi-Jewish ceremonial objects, all but one were replicas from Israel. The only salvaged original was the kadous (wine) cup my great-grandparents gave to my grandparents on my wedding day. It was a silver cup with a silver top, boasting a loose dove in the middle. The dove wobbled around, I was told, because it originally had a Star of David next to it. My grandparents took out the star to make the cup more disguisable ... just in case.

A number of people around me - family, community members, friends' parents - have been completely unable and thus unwilling to discuss details of life and loss in their home countries throughout the Arab world. The pained silence itself has told me a story and given me a sense of the harsh impact of what happened to the Mizrahi community.

Murdered family, decimated community, confiscated land, destroyed property, and refugee reality - all as a direct result of Arab oppression of Jews. It is with this information, understanding, and personal experience that many Mizrahim approach and have insight into the issue of Arab-Israeli relations. In our eyes, Arab animosity towards Israel stems primarily from general Arab hatred of Jews - a hatred that existed prior to and separate from the State of Israel.

Consider for a moment the significance of a prohibition such as not letting a Jew ride a horse. Consider the implications of laws forcing Jewish heads to be forever beneath Muslim heads, Jewish places of worship to be forever below Muslim places of worship, Jewish identity to be forever beneath Arab identity. Consider for a moment how Arab governments that made these laws and Arab citizens that supported them would feel towards a state created for and by the very people supposed to be forever below and at the mercy of Arabs ... How much more aggravating that through the creation of this state, these worthless Jews have the power to create laws governing Arab lives!

I find it telling that the majority of Arabs seem to find Israeli control of east Jerusalem to be insufferable but international rule of the area to be acceptable. Either way, Palestinian Arabs are not in control of the

ter... But at least with international rule, those damn Jews are not... Arab lives.

Similarly, I find it interesting that Palestinian Arabs have centered their struggle for independence around miserable little strips of land along the West Bank and Gaza, when apparently 80% of British-mandated Palestine is now under Jordanian control. Why focus on the minuscule part of Israeli-controlled land, while completely neglecting the massive amount of Jordanian-controlled territory? In other words, how much of the Palestinian Arabs' struggle for independence is truly about reclaiming land and achieving self-rule, and how much of it is about stripping power from Jews? How much of the struggle is pro-Palestinian, and how much of it is anti-Jewish?

From my perspective as a Mizrahi, the Arab-Israel struggle is rooted in an ancient tribal and religious battle, in which Arabs and their forebears have had the upper hand for over a thousand years. During this time, they have taken away Jewish land, stripped Jews of autonomy, and otherwise disempowered Jews.

The Jewish people began 4,000 years ago in Mesopotamia (ancient Iraq). In ancient times, tribes roamed the Middle East and North Africa, with no one force controlling another. Over time, however, empires and kingdoms arose, introducing systems of dominance and subordination, conquer and rule. In time, the Israelites broke free, conquered the land of Canaan, and established their own space and government: Israel. Eventually, however, the Babylonian empire (ancient Iraq) conquered Israel and took Israelites into captivity and exile in Babylon (ancient Iraq).

After the Persian (ancient Iranian) empire conquered the Babylonian Empire about half a century later, Israelites re-established the nation-state of Israel, only to be conquered about 500 years later by the Roman Empire and exiled as slaves to the European continent. Since that time, Israelites maintained their presence on Israeli land, without re-establishing a formal government, until the modern state. In the meantime, they lived under the rule of various governments that took over the region, including that of the Ottoman Empire (under Turkish control) and British-mandated Palestine (under English control).

During the times of Arab rule (following the Muslim invasion in the eighth century) throughout the Middle East and North Africa, the fate of Jews depended on how "useful" they were to the governments and how powerful they became. When Jewish labor was needed, Arab governments treated Jews well. When Jews gained power, Arab governments began persecuting Jews. Life always was uncertain.

But one thing is certain: When Mohammed began the Islamic religion, he initially embraced the Jews, hoping to convert them. After

Jews refused conversion, however, he evidently became furious, thus establishing the scriptures condemning Jews to dhimmi status.

From that time on, Arab oppression of Jews became personal. Jews became specifically targeted, instead of just being the latest tribal victims of Muslim expansion and rule. And Islam swallowed up Judaism, claiming Jewish sites as Muslim and preventing Jews from access to them. Until the re-establishment of Israel, in fact, I understand that Jews were forbidden from entering Arab-controlled places as central to Jewish history and religious practice as the burial site of Abraham, our patriarch.

And so, for thousands of years, Arabs and their forebears have taken things away from Jews indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa. The Mizrahi community thus comes to the Arab-Israel relationship with a legacy of understandable mistrust, based on unceasing Arab efforts to erode away or eliminate altogether our space, power, and autonomy. We are an indigenous people fighting for our right to our own piece of land in our own region, without anymore being hassled or subsumed by Arab rule. We are engaged in a struggle to finally have the collective room to breathe.

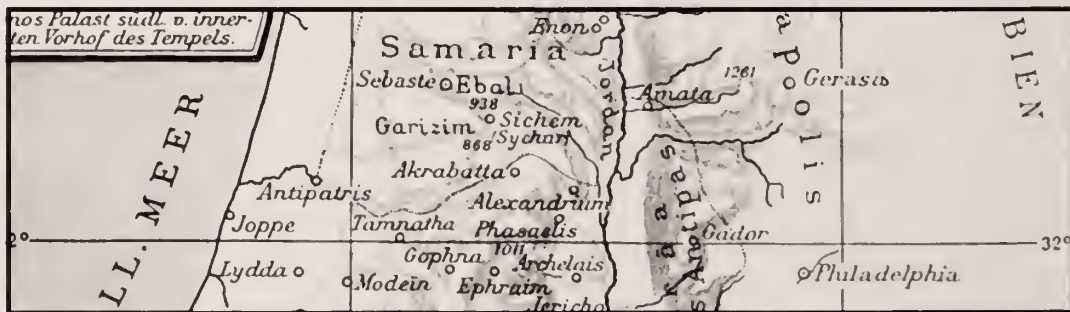
For me, this struggle not only is about having our own space; it also is about recognition of the fact that we exist, that our identity is real and valid. The two of course are related: By recognizing Mizrahi reality, one must recognize our claims to Israeli land. "Ashkenazim got us into this mess," a woman from the Mizrahi and Ethiopian feminist conference said to me, referring to identity politics and controversial land claims in the region. "They did not and do not have as deep a sense of legitimacy of being here as we do, because they are not from here; they are from Europe ... They have backed down in the face of Palestinian claims to the region, because they do not feel the same rights to the land. But we Mizrahim have these rights. We have been here forever."

Seeing Arab resistance and hostility to Israel only from the slant of Arab-as-victim and Jew-as-oppressor overlooks and erases thousands of years of Arab-Jewish history in the Middle East and North Africa. It is inherently Euro-centric: It only recognizes the existence and experi-

ence of European Jews, and it only recognizes power as in the hands of Europeans. Have we forgotten the fact that the Middle East and North Africa were international centers of political power, predating the rise of Europe; that the force of what we call "civilization" originated in this region? Are we so blinded by

whiteness and Euro-centrism that we cannot conceptualize people from this area ever having power over others?


I find it imperative to begin recognizing where Arab resistance and hostility to Israel has been rooted in historical hatred and oppression of Jews. I feel we need to re-examine events of the region with an eye to



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Israeli oppression of Palestinian Arabs - whether at the hands of Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, or anyone else. I challenge my Arab sisters and brothers to be as willing to stand up and speak out about Arab oppression of Mizrahi Jews.

Regarding today's politics, why does the world demand that Israel give land or pay compensation to indigenous Arabs, while remaining completely silent about Arab states having stolen from and forcing out indigenous Jews, who now make up the majority of Israel's population?



For example, I have been to several panels of Arab and Jewish women, where the Arabs were Muslim or Christian and the Jews were white Europeans. Every time, I have raised my hand and spoken about the invisibility of Mizrahi women on the panels. And every time, Arab women from the panel warmly have approached me after the program, taking me aside and telling me something like, "You and I are sisters. We are the same people. It's those Zionists that are the problem." Or, as one Arab woman added after a panel, "Those Ashkenazim are pigs."

Statements like these have made shivers go up my spine. They essentially have asked me to split myself in half, to connect on the basis of one half and forget about the other. They inherently have demanded that I structure my Middle Eastern reality around an Arab construct.

But as a Mizrahi woman, I bring my identity to the table: Culturally, it is true, I have more in common with Arab Muslims and Christians than I do with Ashkenazi Jews. But I am a Jew, and this reality must be acknowledged and addressed. Arab women cannot expect to bond with me against the “big, evil Ashkenazi,” completely ignoring a legacy of Arab oppression of Jews. If we are to unite in alliance, Arabs must hold my struggle in their hearts, as I must hold their struggle in mine.

With rare exceptions, I have not experienced Arab willingness to have different perspectives on Arab-Israel/ Arab-Jewish issues and come together where we agree; rather, I have felt pressure that to be friends or allies, I first must deny my own reality. As such, to be connected, I have felt I must endanger myself, participate in diminishing my own space.

The situation feels comparable to that of many men demanding that women sacrifice our autonomy and integrity to be involved with them. In both cases, I refuse to hand over a piece of myself so as to be connected with someone else. Regarding relations with Arabs, I will not hide my own politics or pain as a precondition of caring for an individual. I find such a precondition to be self-righteous and offensive, as well as destructive to my own integrity.

I deeply desire to connect with Arabs, to heal the wounds between us and support each other's empowerment. I hope I can go into the fire instead of needing to stay far away. I hope I can offer attention, love, and support to Arabs and demand the same in return, helping end this either-or rift between us. And I hope that the uniqueness of Mizrahi voices finally gets heard in the Middle East peace movement and Arab-Israeli peace talks. Regardless of our stand (we certainly are not a monolithic community), the world around us needs to finally recognize us and take seriously what we have to say. *c*

Portions of this essay originally appeared in Kinesis magazine (Summer, 2000)



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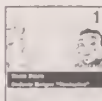
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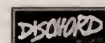
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Q AND NOT U

LIVING ON LUCK

FOREWORD



AND INTERSTATE 90

it's no secret, and i definitely don't deny it - i depend on luck a lot of the time, mostly because i lack the foresight and common sense to plan ahead, and i often find myself in very ideal situations, sometimes with very little effort and few expectations. not to say that my luck is always incredibly good, because it isn't, though i do seem to rely on it enough, as if it really were. there have been bad times, too - lots of them, and when my good luck goes bad, i'm left floundering, desperate and irrational, a complete wreck with little concept of right or wrong, just a general understanding of how to get myself out of, or around the trouble that i wouldn't ordinarily find myself up against.

that summer, my friends seemed to share that same belief, and we lived by it for the entire three months of the season.

IN ABANDON: THE LOST EPISODE

our luck was running out on us already and we knew it. after two weeks of a strange string of good fortune and good spirits, everything had suddenly become pretty bad in comparison.

there was an argument in downtown spokane, and afterwards, we continued driving east along interstate 90 this time, which pushed us straight through the northern tip of idaho and later on, into montana. none of us were speaking to each other at this point, as a result of our previous exchange of words and insults - everyone trying hard to avoid eye contact and preoccupy our time with the passing scenery outside instead. so we continued on in an uncomfortable silence, each of us too stubborn to admit fault and start over.

and i can still remember exactly what that argument was about, and what was said, word for word, even after three years. i remember yelling and just how mad we both were at the time, i remember everything like it was yesterday, but the truth was that none of it really mattered at all. that argument had been a long time coming by that point - there were four of us in the car now - three fucked up kids from florida and my friend mary who was along for the ride, at least for a little while longer. we had been driving together for over a month by the time we had gotten into spokane, never ever too far away from one another, cramped and uncomfortable a lot of the time, continuously hearing the same complaints and bad jokes over and over. the whole thing seemed pretty inevitable. we were wearing on each other's nerves and our patience was almost gone. shit - i'm still surprised that it hadn't happened weeks earlier.

that's what it's like to travel sometimes. it's frustrating and uncomfortable, quite often it's completely exhausting.

you discover things about your friends that never would've been quite so apparent until you committed yourself to them for three months in a cramped automobile. you discover things about yourself, too, like physical and mental inconsistencies, like breaking points and how not to break them. every single one of your previous rules and opin-



PART ONE, THE WORDS

ions will wear down and be reevaluated. it's enlightening, really - enough to establish brand new dispositions and reaffirm old beliefs, enough to strengthen old friendships, if you can keep a level head long enough to get back home without killing each other first. sometimes it's not as easy as it sounds.

three years ago, we were stupid and stubborn, even more so in those days, and that made matters worse, that made opinions stronger and we both ended up saying a lot of things that we immediately regretted afterwards. jack and i are a lot alike in that aspect - we stand strong behind our beliefs and very rarely back down from an argument, no matter how irrational or pointless. but at that point, the reality of the situation was that we were thousands of miles away from home and the only people we could count on were each other. problems are easier to solve when you're far away and on the road, mostly because there's no knowing how much longer you'll have to put up with them and there's no getting around it any other way. we didn't know it then, but we still had another month and a half ahead of us before we would be back in florida again. besides, with our luck as bad as it was becoming, it was probably best to put the pettiness aside and figure out a way to get through the next few days in one piece.

jack and i solved our problems pretty quickly after that - in less time than it took to cross over the tip of idaho, but i still can't remember saying too much to him for the next few days.

1. PART TWO, THE ROADS

the northwest interior really is quite beautiful,

especially montana.

interstate 90 slowly snakes through the states unending mountains and dense forests, and most of the area is untouched by development. you can drive for miles and miles without seeing a single sign along the side of the highway, and there were very few cars driving during the day, far far less at night, as we soon came to discover. i like that a lot.

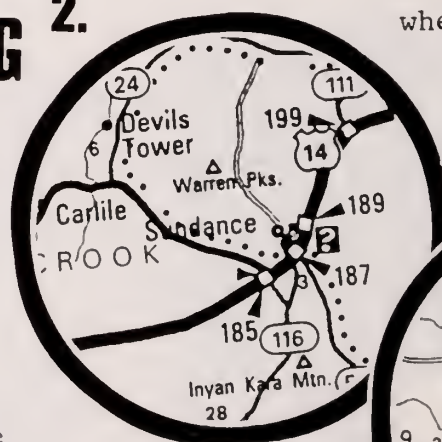
later that night, jack drove like a maniac through the dark, and i was curled up next to mary in the back of the car - too exhausted to keep my eyes open, too nervous to fall asleep. it was raining hard outside and we couldn't see anything, so it was probably best to keep them closed anyways. the weather didn't stop jack from barreling into the emptiness ahead of us, though, and he continued to race along the slick roads, attempting to outrun the rainstorms and find a dry place to sleep for the night.

MONTANA

i think it's safe to tell you now, that by this point, i was so sure something very bad was going to happen to us that night. it seemed inevitable, but fortunately, the remaining bit of our somewhat good luck held out and we fell asleep on the side of the road some where in wyoming instead.

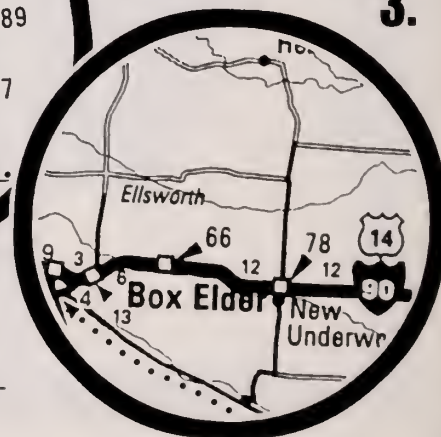
still, by the next morning, things had gotten worse and we woke up shivering uncontrollably. it was cold and uncomfortable and my teeth were chattering, my fingers were turning blue. ordinarily, i don't mind sleeping outside, or on top of frozen concrete, i don't mind it at all - it's a minor inconvenience that i've learned to put up with, like canned food or caffeine headaches. something that doesn't matter too much, an unimportant detail when taken into consideration of the much bigger picture. that morning was different, though, for all of us, because we were fucking miserable. the weather was bad, and my sleeping bag was no match for the cold wind that soaked right through and woke me up after only a couple of hours of already bad sleep. grumbling, we brushed our teeth in the rest stop bathroom sinks and continued driving. we were irritable and angry, but happy to get ourselves out of that miserable weather.

2. WYOMING



S. DAKOTA

3.



we ventured further along interstate 90 and the weather remained pretty inhospitable. the highway slices through wyoming at it's northeastern corner and continues into south dakota, an asphalt artery that runs horizontally throughout the state, dividing it into two. never-ending cloud cover made it difficult to tell what time of day it was, and it was cold and raining slightly down onto us. through the badlands, we ran out of fuel and stranded ourselves on the sides

of the road in the middle of nowhere, leaving us wondering whether the very last of our luck had indeed run out on us also.

to make matters worse, i was starting to get sick again, slowly and surely losing all hope for a somewhat happy ending, and proving to myself that south dakota just might be one of the bleakest places i've ever encountered.

we sat on the hood of the car in the rain, wondering how we had gotten ourselves into such a mess, and if we could get back out of it again. it was such a hopeless situation and doom seemed inevitable. we were tired and irritable, stranded in a strange place where we knew no one at all, broken and completely defeated. yes, it was that bad, but it never got much worse than that, at least not any more than it had already become. at least not for another few weeks. our luck continued to dwindle, and out of desperation, we managed to trade one of my zines for a half gallon of gasoline, which was just enough to get us back into civilization and out of that fucking miserable rain. let's hear it for DIY xeroxed self publishing saving the day like we always knew it could!

after that, things didn't quite seem as bad as they did, even though they still really were.

i didn't want to fool myself into thinking that everything would suddenly be ok, and i don't want to fool you into thinking that it all ended up that way after that, because it didn't. it's strange, but sometimes in those moments of complete hopelessness, good things happen to you that ordinarily wouldn't happen at all. watch closely next time, and you'll see. it's that unusual twist of fate that occurs only in our most pathetic situations and makes everything easier to laugh at later. by now, i know it well, but three years ago, it was only an amazing combination of relief and skepticism, a very much welcomed change, really.

out of the cold, we drank as much coffee as we could at wall drug, more than we probably should have really, but we were wasting time and avoiding the roads, didn't have anywhere in particular to go anyways. and at five cents a cup, it was something we could both afford and enjoy. besides, after our initial bout with misfortune, we deserved it and our nickels were stacked high on the table, among the piles of sugar packets and cigarette ash. even mediocre coffee is better than no coffee at all, and it made everything a little bit better, at least for the time being. we weren't battling our bad luck or even each other any longer, and afterwards, we felt



MIKE & IN ABANDON



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EPILOGUE*

a little more confident in our situation and in ourselves. just a little bit more alive than before. still, i wasn't so sure, and i had every right not to be. our good luck would eventually return, but we still had six more weeks ahead of us and the worst of it all was yet to come.

* the remainder of south dakota was very much like wyoming and montana before it, continuing nothingness - just a slow geographical flattening of the mountains, followed by unending fields of grass and a few trees. occasionally we'd notice a single house planted in the very middle of it all, looking very out of place, like it didn't belong, like it wasn't supposed to be there. very much like us.

a conversation with

NYC artist and gallery owner

Aaron Rose The Alleged Gallery

questions and photos by Cynthia Connolly

I think the first time I met Aaron Rose was in 1994. It was in his first gallery space, on Ludlow Street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I clearly remember how busy he was, and I remember being completely bowled over by the amount of really good art stacked against the walls in the back. To this day I can recall the moment I first saw a painting by an artist named Thomas Campbell. Thinking of that moment now still brings me the inspiration that I felt on that day in 1994, and years later it was that experience that led me to track down Thomas Campbell and ask him if he'd like to trade art. I had realized I needed that continual "inspiration." (Photos documenting part of that trade transaction were shown in the summer of 1998 in an interview I did in Punk Planet.) I truly believe that the art Aaron Rose exhibits will someday be named as a "type" or "movement" in art and written about in history books. I sometimes wonder what art I would be doing if I never met Aaron Rose or any of the artists from that "scene," or if I would be doing art at all. I really didn't know a lot about Aaron's past, but I was intrigued and have been wanting to do an interview with him for years. I hope this will be as much of an inspiration to others as it was to me.

Interview with Aaron Rose, owner of the Alleged Gallery in New York City, by Cynthia Connolly, June 16th, 2000. All photos by Cynthia Connolly.

I interviewed Aaron in the Gallery while he was taking down a show and packing up paintings. We started talking about how I bought a Walkman in Hong Kong. I had been there, and Aaron had not been there. The interview begins:

Cynthia Connolly: So, do you have an Alleged Gallery in Japan?

Aaron Rose: Yes ...

Who runs the gallery in Japan?

It's run by a guy named Senji. He was one of my collectors. He was buying a lot of art when we were on Ludlow Street. He was buying so much that he said, "You know what? I'm buying so much that I want to do a gallery in Japan." It just made sense.

Is he from Tokyo?

Yeah, you know that skateboarding company called Supreme? He was the original backer of that when it started. He wanted to get out of that business. He got screwed over a little bit and he was always into art, so it made sense for him just to open a gallery; that way he would get a discount for buying the art [Aaron was wrapping a painting ... then he stopped]. It's a joy for him, he's totally into it. He's like an art addict. It's the perfect job for him. He buys so much of it, he can sell it just as well.

Because he's so enthusiastic about it.

He can give people the pitch honestly. He's like fighting collectors over which one he's going to buy.

That's cool. Isn't that how you are?

Yeah, basically. I buy something from every show.

You do? Where do you put it?

In storage until I have my mansion or my museum [he laughs].

"The Aaron Rose Museum of Contemporary Art." [ha ha]

He's in a better position than I am. I usually buy one small piece.

Why did you start doing a gallery in the first place? When did you move to NYC?

1989. I was in an acoustic punk band. It was called "Cat Fur Nit Ure." I say acoustic punk for lack of a better term. It was really just really bad.

Did you move to New York (from Los Angeles) because you thought it would be cool to be in "New York?"

No, we were playing in L.A. at places like Al's Bar, like that whole sort of downtown art rock music scene. We were all living downtown in one of those shitty crack hotels. We were rehearsing there too. We decided to do a tour and one of the guys in the band knew some people in New York, so we

took the Greyhound [we both laugh] from Los Angeles to New York. We got here and the friend was not around.

Oh. Totally typical.

I came here with \$150 thinking that I could make it, and it was gone the second night I was here.

What did you do?

I moved into Covenant House, the homeless shelter for troubled teens [he goes and answers the phone].

I've heard of that place. It's Christian or something.

It's famous because the father, whom I met, who started it, was indicted for molesting all these little boys. He had this young boyfriend that he was flying all around the world.

This was in 1989?

I floated around NYC. I worked at clothing stores and stuff. The band was around for about two years.

Were you still at the Covenant House?

No, I met a girl one day and I moved in with her. We did acid and we moved in together. I don't know where she is, she's gone. I think she moved to Florida. I lived with her for about six months. I was working a job and I found an apartment way down on Ludlow Street. I lived down there. The band was still rehearsing in the bathroom of my place that I shared with six people ... one room.

On Ludlow:

On Ludlow, the fourth floor.

So who were the other people?

Random people. There was an ad in *The Voice*, "\$400 a month, share a loft."

It was one big room. One person had that corner, someone had the other corner. THEN, I met another girl. I moved out of that place and I moved to Brooklyn. It was a year and a half of domestic bliss. It was luxury living with a grand piano, the high life. I got a job as a waiter in a restaurant. I was getting \$300 a night in tips. A year and a half of that, then I realized that I was totally unhappy. Bullshit life. I was like 40 years old yet I was only 21.

When was this?

I was with her from '90-'92.

What did she do for a living?

She was a musician. A pianist.

Was she from NYC? Where was she from?

I really don't know. I think she actually moved back to San Francisco. Anyway, after I was going to move out from there, some mutual friends were living in this storefront space on Ludlow Street. These guys were from L.A., they were in the film business. They were doing commercials. They said it was a gallery, but it was more like parties with a lot of drugs. Their whole scene crumbled. They moved back to L.A. Except for one girl, Mary Beth, who I was friends with. Anyway, the whole Alleged concept. It's all about her. If she hadn't come to me, it wouldn't have happened. Prior to that point, I wasn't interested in opening a gallery.

Were you into art?

I was painting. The year before that, my first introduction to the exhibition scene was doing the exhibition on the first Lollapalooza tour. I was on the east coast tour.

Was it just you or were there other artists?

There were a few other artists.

How did they know your art?

They had an open call in *Spin Magazine*.

And you sent them something?

Yes, and they choose it. I sent snapshots, like here, this is what I do.

So, I was painting the whole time, yet not seriously. Then I started seriously



painting when ...

...and it wasn't graffiti?

Little bit, but it was mostly stickers.

What do you mean stickers? Like the ones you write on?

Yeah, but I'd have them made on photocopier machines. They'd have like spades on them.

Yeah! I have one of them. You were really into the number four.

Yeah, all my artwork is about the "Number 4." Carnival signs and banners but it was kind of mystical. When I had that huge loft in Brooklyn — I had all this space to paint. I could paint these massive canvasses. My escape from that whole situation in that "high-life loft scene" in Brooklyn was the fantasy world of artwork. Fast forward to Mary Beth ... she said, "Are you interested in this space, because everyone is falling apart and moving out?" I had to get out of that situation in Brooklyn. As a matter of fact, I started packing all my shit at night into boxes like I was ready to go, then I'd wimp out and unpack everything.

What?! Are you serious?

Then, I'd go back to bed. This happened like 10 times.

Did you tell your girlfriend that you wanted to move out?

No, I didn't. When Mary Beth offered me this space on Ludlow, this was it. It was like, "This is God, change your fucking life." So, one afternoon I packed all my shit, and my girlfriend came home, and she says, "What's going on?" and a truck came and in 10 minutes I was gone. It was heavy. I moved in with these two DJ friends of mine and Mary Beth was still living there, it was a four room place. I decided to open a gallery. At least I was going to show my artwork. So, after the first month, I painted the gallery, and I showed all this artwork that I made. It was a huge party. It was open some of the time, people were interested, and I think I sold some stuff. I thought, well, fuck it, I should do another one. So, two months later, I went around the Lower East Side and met all these artists. Max Fish, that bar down the street, just opened and it was a full-on squat bar. I hung out in the bar every night. I pulled artists from that bar from that scene. It was a show about Satanism and the apocalypse and all that. That show went well, so I was like, "Fuck it, I'm into the gallery business." We did well, because the rent was so low, \$400 a month. We could live there and do it. The gallery was in existence for a year before we actually kept "real" hours.

When you mean, "did well"? Does that mean people liked it or that you sold a lot of stuff?

People were into it. I think *Paper* magazine wrote it up.

Everyone was enthusiastic?

in L.A., but when you were in New York did you skate?

I skated around NYC for transportation. I knew a lot of skaters. I was really into the graphics. I didn't really have any contacts in the industry. I knew one guy who did some t-shirts for Dogtown. I met him through his girlfriend one night and we were talking about tattoos. So I called him. I went to L.A. and met up with him and stuff. This guy, Tomas, his sister was friends with Julia Spiegel whose brother is a guy named Adam Spiegel aka "Spike Jonze." This was way before all that, he was working on a magazine called *Dirt*. So, I call him, "Can I speak to Adam Spiegel? I know your sister, Julia, and I heard you're involved with skateboarding, and I want to do an art show about skateboarding." Spike turned me onto Andy Jenkins and a million other people and it just grew. That's how I met Mark Gonzales, Thomas Campbell, Chris Johanson, everyone.

Oh, I thought that all those people were hanging out in New York. [Aaron walks to the front of the gallery to tell people it's closed.]

It was all through Spike and Andy Jenkins. Spike told me to call Andy, then I called Andy and he faxed a list of people that he knew, then I called them all.

All those people, were they all in the show?

They all sent stuff. Who was in the show? Mark was in Italy doing some skating stuff. So, he faxed his art — it was like 200 pages for one whole wall.

Wow, that's amazing so many people sent you stuff, considering that they don't know who you are.

I know. Well, there had been only one other show like that ever done. Dan Field who used to manage Ministry had a skate shop called "Sessions." He did a show in Chicago.

So, the art wasn't art on skateboards.

A few. It was art, photos and a lot of printed decks. Production decks with cool graphics.

When was that?

End of '92. After that, people were really excited. We got written up in *New York Newsday*.

What was the title of the show?

[long pause] *Minimal Tricks.*

That's good.

It was taken from a "Skate Master Tate" song.

I can't believe it that's how it happened. I always thought you did a show of art from your friends.

Basically, after that, I started meeting a lot of people and so it became a big

I don't believe there is skateboard art. None of the artists do either, except the bad ones who are trying to use that to get somewhere.

mixture of New York people and California people.

Do you have contracts?

Basically. They're verbal, there are understandings.

So, if you have a show here with someone, you say, "Okay, this is the deal."

We sit down and work it out. Don't ask me why, but it's not standard in the gallery world to have contracts.

It's NOT?!

It's this whole trust, "We're in it together" thing.

Huh? I figured this whole time that since I'm doing this from the punk side of things, that's why I never ran into that. But in a show of mine coming up, a woman sent a contract, which is cool because then it's all clear and up front, but then she started changing things about it. So, it was great, I could pull out the contract and say, "I don't understand."

I do that. It's a standard consignment agreement. It explains what we do and what we don't do, and there's a list of all the works in the exhibit.

When did you start doing that kind of stuff?

On Ludlow Street.

What's up with you storing all the art? The first time I went there, there was all this art in the back. In a way, you have to store it.

In a way, I don't want to, but artists don't want it. I have a whole storage space FULL. I went over there yesterday. It is a disaster. Three hundred pieces all sorts of crazy stuff, just sitting in there.

You need to take digital photos and sell it online.

I won't sell original art online. I believe the job of a gallery director is not just about selling something and it's gone, you have to be able to trace it in 20 years. So, when there's the Whitney retrospective, it will be findable. I want to meet everyone, face to face. Prints, posters, books, okay, I don't need to meet them. A lot of people in the art world say, "It's stupid, it's the future. You'd make a lot more money."

Yeah, you can. My friend, Martin, buys art on ebay. It seems like half the art gets destroyed when it is sent through the mail. People who sell stuff on ebay don't know how to ship art or anything. There is a whole pile of garbage on there.

It's a garbage dump.

Yeah. When did the Japanese gallery start?

January 2000.

You obviously went there, did you set it up? Did you tell him, "Hey, this is the way I do things, and you have to do it this way, since you're doing a gallery using the Alleged name"?

Yeah, basically it's a franchise, like McDonald's.

Did you sell it to him?

He bought a portion of the company.

So are you incorporated?

Yeah, he bought a percentage of the

company and it's a standard franchise deal. He runs the day to day, and he puts his personal touch onto it. He can do things the way he does them, but we go there and do the show and "allegedy" things.

How often are there shows?

Every two months.

You go there every two months and you do this gallery here in New York City? You're insane. [We laugh at the insanity of so much work]. When you toured that show with Mark Gonzales all over the world and you got some money from Levi's, when did you come up with that idea and how do you do that?

Sponsorship? Companies came to us.

When the first company came to you, what did they say to you?

I don't know, I can't remember. It was like clothing companies and skate companies. Like artists did stuff for their companies. They'd throw us like \$500 to put their name on the invite. [People leave from the front entry hallway/store and Aaron goes to look to be sure they didn't steal anything.] Same thing with Levi's. They contacted a friend of mine in London. He is an "on the scene" guy in London. They hired him to do some shit for them. "We know you do a lot of cool things and know a lot of cool people." He calls me and tells me about it, and he says, "Let's do a Mark Gonzales tour." We proposed the exhibition to them, and they were like, "Yeah, great" So they paid for everything: the shipping of all the art, etc.?

Well, kind of. I had to do the whole budget for the whole tour in advance and I'd never shipped giant "Schmoo" sculptures all over the world before. [The Schmoo is the general name of Mark's characters. The ones in shipping crates were called Flinx, the pink one, and Schminx, the white one. The Flinx and Schminx are each as big as a cargo van and are made out of fiberglass.]

Was it one shipping crate?

One, no TWO, shipping crates. AND all the paintings and all the travel expenses AND all the invitations AND the hotel rooms AND all the food AND mailing. I put in a bid, at the time, I thought it was so high, so much money.

Like what, \$50,000?

No, more. At the time I thought it would cover it. So, after London, the first city, I realized we were in deep shit.

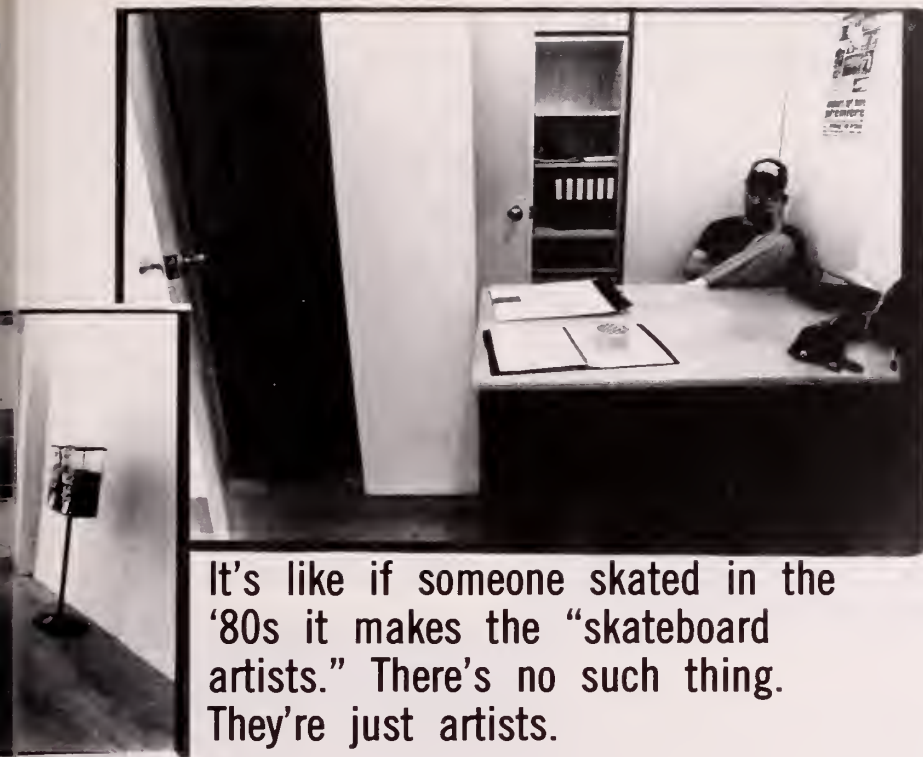
Did you go back to them and say, "I fucked up, I'm going to need more money"?

They were like, "Well, we signed this contract. We used up our budget and



This Page Top spread: The front room with the store on the left and Aaron on the right, at the newest Alleged Gallery on 809 Washington Street, 6-16-00 (the gallery is in the back).

Bottom: In the back room of the Alleged's second location, on Prince Street, 1-25-98. (originally a half frame color photo). Art by Aaron Rose at the Alleged Gallery's second location, 1-25-98 (originally a color half frame photo). Next Page: Part of the gallery in The Alleged's third and most recent location at 809 Washington Street 6-16-00



It's like if someone skated in the '80s it makes the "skateboard artists." There's no such thing. They're just artists.

we don't have any more money for this year for this project." In the end, it ended up not being that profitable of a venture.

Did you lose money?

Yeah, I "out-of-pocketed" a lot of stuff, 10 grand.

You didn't get any free Levi's or anything out of the deal.

No, no, no. Mark got them. But it's my fault. I had never did anything on that scale before. There are so many variables.

Like when the shipping crate sat in Hong Kong when it was supposed to be in Japan. It never made it there for the opening and you had to cancel the opening in Japan and go another time when you finally got the art there.

Exactly, it was going from Berlin to Japan. I flew to Japan and flew back, twice.

What's the deal with this space? This is the third space. Do you have a lease?

I have a five year lease with an option. It could be ten years. I want to see what happens with the development of the neighborhood.

Why did you move out of Ludlow Street?

Because I had roommate trouble, landlord trouble and it was rat infested. The gallery got to the point where it was a real business. People were coming in and we were having meetings. It became more than a bunch of friends doing art shows. So I had to make a choice. Either everybody had to be kicked out, and it would become fully commercial and no one can live there, or the gallery moves out. [He walks away to deal with some people who walked in ...] The success of the gallery [he laughs], I mean, what I thought of as the "success" of the gallery, was coming into conflict with the living situation there. But at the same time, I was dead focused on this thing. It was blowing up, what I thought was "blowing up" at the time. There was a lot of tension at the time from the roommates. I was fed up. So fuck it, that's it. We did our last show. It was a group show, every artist we had ever shown. Floor to ceiling with art.

When was that?

'94?

I think I was there in '94. Dan Higgs had a show there.

He was one of the last shows. It was early 1995. There was a clothing store next door, and there was a fashion show on the street. Then, I just closed the doors and I took off for a while. I went to Australia and did that "Summer Sault" music festival in Australia with Steve Pav. I was there for a month. It was awesome. Goodbye to that whole thing. Did that, came back, fucked around on Ludlow Street and tried to figure out what to do. My friend, Harmony, was moving out of his apartment and I took over his apartment

on Prince Street.

Was that where I visited you once?

Yeah, it was at Prince and Lafayette. I needed somewhere to go. I couldn't stay at Ludlow anymore. And I was staying on my girlfriend's couch, which was like a block away from Ludlow Street, but I couldn't walk into that place ... you know? So I moved into his place and moved all my shit out of Ludlow (or what I wanted) and I started looking for a gallery.

It took a while?

It took a year and half. I took six months off and wrote a business plan and looked for investors.

How do you find investors?

Collectors, different people I knew, who sort of already said, "If you want to do something, if you want to go bigger with this send me a plan." And then I was a freelance curator. I did a show at the Threadwaxing space, I did a show of Mike Mills in Japan, and another person in Japan. I also curated shows with The Holly Solomon Gallery and The Andrea Rosen Gallery. There came a point where it felt like it was too long that the gallery was closed and that people were forgetting about it. I had to do something quick. Real estate options were hard. I was negotiating a space on Crosby Street for six months. The day I was going to sign the lease, they gave it to some restaurant. I had a whole string of bad real estate luck. Being the idiot that I am, I hadn't signed the lease on Crosby. We made a verbal agreement. It was coming to September, which is the beginning

of the art season, this was August. So I was like, fuck it, I have to set up a show and if I don't set it up, then I'll miss September, the opening of the season. The week before I thought I got the space. I called all these people up, and I got sponsorship and got artists and stuff and then all of a sudden I lost the space.

Oh no.

I had plane tickets and everything. [We laugh how insane this is.] No one knows this, actually. I had this friend who had this space on Prince Street, and he was parking his car in it. He was in the fashion business and he wanted to open a clothing store in it. Basically, he was paying rent to park his car. So I called him up, "I lost this space and I have this show coming up. Can I use your space on Prince to do this show?" "Yeah, ok, you can do it." Then we talked about it and he was into doing it for a year, and if he's not ready to do his thing, then we can do it for two years. So, then I took the space, and I did that show in a week and a half! Like 24 hours straight we worked on that show. After a year, we started getting a lot of attention in that space. The owner of the space, he got a little pissed about it, as it was his space. He always wanted to be the one who made it in the space. He was really attached to it. We got into some arguments. So then he said, "Okay, a years up," and I said, "Okay, give me until October." Then we did the Mike Mills show and then after that I was homeless again.

Didn't it take you another year to move?

Yes, another year. I spent all my financing money for that year's rent on Prince Street. We were making money, but it was an expensive operation. I had a little money left over in reserve, but not that much to find a new





I never judge art [I show] by whether I like it. I have to respect it, even if I don't like it. It has to be original. The artist has to have dedication, and it has to be 100 percent for them. I might not always love it, but I respect their work.

space. Plus the real estate market tripled in New York that year. All of a sudden that "dot-com" money made everything crazy.

Was that '97?

End of '97 we closed. It was '98 when I was looking for spaces. So then I had to refinance again and find a whole new group of people to invest. I looked at 60 spaces in Chelsea and they were the most boring unattractive spaces. They had no character.

What's this space?

Chelsea is like 24th Street. I looked at so much stuff. One day walking back, I walked through this neighborhood, and all this stuff was for rent, and they were weird quirky spaces. I found this space and within two weeks of finding it, I moved in.

You never installed the supermarket sliding doors? [He had mentioned putting in those doors when he got the space.]

There's not enough room for those doors. I needed a big door so we can move the art in and out and those doors aren't big enough. You need the panel where the door slides to. I wanted those doors that went ... not one, but two that opened, like the parting of the sea when you walk in.

You were tagged as a skateboard artist gallery. I've heard that you don't like that label.

Well, I don't believe there is skateboard art.

Why?

None of the artists do either, except the bad ones, who are trying to use that to get somewhere. The art that skateboarders make, has nothing to do with skating.

The only unifying thing is that they are skateboarders.

Exactly. Like, there's no such thing. It's like if someone who was into punk rock and skated in the '80s makes them "skateboard artists." There's no such thing. They are artists. That's why I hate it. Just because they grew up in a certain time.

It's something for the media to use to make it sound different. It's a label. [Aaron goes to answer the phone in the front room.]

So, that's my problem with skateboard art. A lot of the artists I work with skate, but it's not about skating, it just what they are doing. They are as influenced by music, style, or from like the bums on the street or from anything as they are from skateboarding. It's like a media tag. It helps some of the artists but it also hinders them.

Surfer art.

Surfer art, graffiti is graffiti art, it is what it is. And hot rod art: it's about cars, pinstripping and hot rod related stuff. But skateboard art is not like that. It's creative people. Creative people are drawn to counter cultural activi-



ties. So in the mid-'80s when we are all fucking teenagers and it was Black Flag and punk rock, and skating, that was the only thing a creative kid could do.

The art that you show here, do you like it?

Yeah.

You like all of it?

I never judge art by whether I like it, but 99 percent of the art I show here I do like because I have to live with it for a month. So I have to enjoy it. I have to respect it, even if I don't like it. It has to be original. It has to be ... something. The artist has to have that dedication, it has to be 100 percent for them. I might not always love it, but I respect their work.

I used to book bands at a place in D.C. called d.c. space. I actually didn't like most of the music. But if I thought the person was honest and it was something they were really into, then I would book it.

A gallery is a bit different than that, because it's not just like booking a space, I'm their manager, too.

Are you for every person?

No, this is a group show, so I'm not managing them.

How many artists do you represent?

Ten.

Does that mean that you have a contract with them and they can't do shows elsewhere?

It goes through me. Different artists have different galleries. Like, I'm just New York for some. Like, for Mark Gonzales, it's for the whole world. Chris Johanson, he has a gallery in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and I'm

just New York.

So you work things out like that.

Everything goes through me in New York.

So do you get insulted if someone all of a sudden does something else somewhere else?

In New York? Yeah. [He answers the ringing phone. It's the shipping company asking for money for shipping the Schmoos on Mark Gonzales's tour. After he hangs up we talk about how all the bills should have been sent to Levi's so that Aaron's credit isn't affected and how, now that it's over, Levi's aren't paying Aaron.] They won't make the final payment to me. They asked for all the press from the tour. And then they say, yeah, we got it, but some of the dates are cut off. Then Fraser says he was going to make a video, just something cool to make. It's not in the contract. Now they are saying that since they aren't getting the video they aren't paying me. But that was a gift, it's not even in the contract. I called them this morning and they weren't even there.

It's so bad. It makes a bad name for them. It's not like you are going to go around and talk about how great Levi's are. You probably will never wear Levi's ever again in your life, if you did wear Levi's.

No, no, no. But it's not all bad either, those tours in Europe really boosted Mark's career. We lost money, but it will all pay off in a couple years. Because of the press it generated, it brought him to another level, but not in a financial way yet. I didn't budget in for the \$300 phone bill in each hotel when Mark talked to his girlfriend. I didn't budget in the room service and all that shit. Nice hotels, the phone bills are more. I didn't budget it in.

That's the hotel where I took a photo of you in. That was when I dropped by for like two minutes on my photo tour of Europe.

Yeah, it is. Probably when you were taking that photo, Mark was on the phone with his girlfriend. [We both laugh] I'm having a lot of trouble right now, from that shit. I took a lot of money from here to pay for that. Things are getting really crazy right now.

Yeah, you need to budget in to have an assistant. All that is a pain in the ass. I realized as you get older, you just have more paperwork to deal with and that bogs you down. When you are 20 you have nothing. So when you did the first show at Alleged, you just did it, and you have nothing behind you. You don't have a storage space full of stuff to think about. You know, you have a different kind of energy. I think about that with my own stuff. "Fuck, what am I going to do with all this crap?" I mean this is not crap, but...

Next time this situation comes up, I'll know what to do.

Brendan, the assistant, comes in. He was successful in getting tape and packing materials to pack the paintings. They talk about how much tape he bought.. blah blah.. We are then distracted and the interview ends. ☿

A Rabbi and a Punk.

thoughts on marriage and religion

Richard Gilman Opalsky

I was married on May 28, 2000. In truth, I feel somewhat awkward divulging this rather personal information, making it public for reasons that are not very clear. Perhaps sharing this experience with others is just a way of working through its difficulties, coming to grips with the situation.

The topic of marriage is a lengthy one, and I do not intend to take it up here and now — although I *will* be writing about it some day soon. In our present time, we need to corrupt or distort what marriage has meant traditionally. It needs to conform to radical changes if it is to survive as a social institution. If we cannot change it to better accommodate social advancements we should let it die, and if we leave it as it is now, it will die anyway. If the social institution of marriage dies or becomes obsolete I, for one, will not mourn its death.

Marriage is very complex, and the reasons why most people of my generation are still drawn to marry are psychological and emotional, and are only practical inasmuch as they secure good health insurance, tax or legal benefits for their spouse. Besides this, marriage is not very useful at all. Often in our society, it is oppressive. But do not belittle the psychological and emotional motivations to marry, as they are legitimate and profound, deeply rooted in cultural and personal history. In fact, I do believe that many are and can still be involved in happy and healthy marriage. It is too quick and easy to see the problems with marriage as problems that are inherent in the institution of marriage itself. More accurately, these are problems that arise whenever a traditional social institution is passively accepted without real scrutiny and understanding. Aware of its culpability in enforcing gender oppression, sex repression, and religious moralities, Robyn and I have entered marriage with the aim to satisfy our emotional, psychological and practical needs, while ceaselessly challenging those traditional characteristics.

Robyn and I are a non-traditional couple in so many ways, as we are traditional in many others. Robyn works for a family-owned business helping to distribute rubber stamps to independently owned and operated craft stores from Canada to South Carolina. I make lots of noise in a punk band, study philosophy and radical politics, and work at the university where I study. The two of us are very different people, but we share much common ground. Amongst this common ground is our complete detachment from religion. Raised by parents who self-identify as Jewish, to varying degrees, but who know very little about Judaism, we have always been distant from the meaning and culture of religion. Our distance from religion enabled us to critique it with skepticism at very young ages. To this day, Robyn and I are often hostile to the notion of religious indoctrination, and are therefore very leery of all organized religions. Mostly, we look upon religion (not to be confused with spirituality) as a fearful and unfortunate thing. Such a practice has never been of interest to either of us. But at the same time, we try to respect and support everyone's right to preserve and practice his or her religion.

Probably, Robyn and I should have eloped. Our wedding day was fine and well, but it really was more of a gift to our parents than a celebration of our unique togetherness. A wedding itself is just a formality, as the most beautiful lavish weddings are often followed by the ugliest divorces.

The biggest mistake we made for the appeasement of parental wishes was allowing a rabbi to perform our ceremony. I made 'cold calls' to reform synagogues in the yellow pages saying, "I am getting married and I need a rabbi willing to give us only the bare minimum of what it takes to make a Jewish wedding. We do not care for having a rabbi in particular," I said, "but our parents do." Finally, I was referred to Greenstein, "a very liberal and non-traditional rabbi."

By the wedding date we had met with Rabbi Greenstein for approximately 14 hours, on four different occasions. Each visit was engaging, and we were quite a challenge to him. He was interested in our fervor and he was enthusiastic over our plans. It was a painful struggle to get the three of us agreeing on what was acceptable. We wanted to omit 2,000-year-old traditions for political reasons, and he wanted to make them sound viable and applicable in the modern world. It was an exhausting struggle. The tired and elderly man was pushed to his limits, and we were bending as much as we would.

Before the wedding, we were relatively confident that he would represent us okay, since he really did get to know us. We were friends. But ultimately, the ceremony was not very close to Robyn and I, and we were even pretty angry for a while. Below, I have pasted the first correspondences that Rabbi Greenstein and I ever had over e-mail. I do this to give you a glimpse at the first steps of the process. While it may not be evident from the correspondences below, this experience has confirmed my unfulfilled inclination: Never allow a religious representative to marry you, unless you are a religious individual yourself. Only marry on your own terms, making it meaningful according to you- or it is better to toss the rotting corpse of marriage to the heaping pile of defunct social institutions, which is still much smaller than it should be.

(continued on next page)

Richard Greenstein,

I am writing to elaborate on the skeletal description that I gave you on Monday about my forthcoming marriage to Robyn.

Robyn and I do not self-identify as 'Jewish' because we are not observant of Jewish holidays. Also, because our present community and spirituality are not intentionally made up of Jews and 'Jewishness'. Our immediate families are more 'Jewish' than we, but neither are they deeply involved in Jewish community or spirituality. They observe the bigger Jewish holidays, but, for the most part, they are unaware as to why. Hence, their 'Jewishness' is mostly defined as an abstract familial identity. I suppose that there is also an element of cultural affinity that they appreciate, although none of them attend synagogue congregations on anything close to a regular basis.

In my case, I think that my detachment from Judaism was first caused by my parents' inability to explain the utility or meaning of the rituals and observances. Both Robyn and I went to Hebrew School as kids, and both of us had Bar and Bat Mitzvahs... However, we did these things under the mandate and wishes of our parents who never gave any reasons to do them besides: 'Your Jewish', or 'Never mind, you'll be glad you did this when you get older'. But we still reflect on those experiences as unfortunate, and, by my own standards, I think I only became a 'man' at around the age of 20.

Neither Robyn nor I are atheists. But we are definitely not theists either. I suppose that we are agnostics. Personally, I believe that there are no solid grounds upon which to disbelieve or believe in God. However, I do think that people who really believe in God have not been bullied into their belief—nor do they believe out of some fear of reprisal. I think that people ought to embrace religiosity and place their faith in God, only as long as it comes about in a religious way. I agree with Søren Kierkegaard and St. Augustine that one cannot inherit their belief in God from one's family like a pair of wool socks... But, rather, that one must come to belief in God through some form of revelation or spiritual/mystical experience. Hence, I am not opposed to religiosity or the Jewish faith, but merely think that those who are truly religious have had an experience (or experiences) that Robyn and I have never had.

I would say that, out of our combined immediate family, my soon-to-be father-in-law is the most conscientiously and emotionally connected to Judaism. Although I admit that I know very little about his faith, I do know that he has been entirely unsuccessful in explaining to Robyn why we should work to embrace our religious prehistory. As I understand it, he too simply thinks that it is just the right thing to do for children born to Jewish parents; that knowing the history of the Jewish people should be enough of a reason to accept Judaism. But I am not just interested in Jewish history. I am interested in world history and the history of all groups of people. I think that it should not be hollow tradition, and agree with Martin Buber that to be a Jew is to not only know a few Jewish maxims, but to believe in them with your heart as a natural consequence of studying them. Nevertheless, I do believe in the Jewish proverb that "all are oppressed when one is oppressed." According to this proverb, the Jews and everyone else are under constant oppression. There are so many forms of oppression prevalent in our society and international societies, and not all of these people are Jews. We would like to have a Rabbi marry us so that our marriage is sensitive to the wishes and feelings of our families. We have written a script, which we would ask you to read, and which I can e-mail to you on Monday. I don't think that we would like to have any Jewish scripture read.

If you cannot relate to our situation, or are simply unwilling to marry such a couple—we will understand completely. However, if this is the case, perhaps you could refer us to someone else (a reform Rabbi, Jewish clergy, or judge) who could perform our marriage. By the way, it was very nice

speaking with you on the phone, and I appreciate your interest and consideration.

Yours sincerely, Richard Opalsky

Dear Rich,

It's good to hear from you so quickly. I, too, appreciated our phone conversation this afternoon. And still more, I welcome the honesty with which you set out your views here. I think I can appreciate them entirely.

In my own life I have had the wonderful opportunity to spend virtually a lifetime studying to fill in all the blanks that you outline here. I wish you had had that opportunity also. From what you have studied, I think you are quite right in so much of what you say, and you seem to be well read, too. Yet there are steps beyond what you have read. I think those steps make their way through Jewish history as an important part of world history.

Your wedding, as you have described it to me so far, does not seem to move outside of the bounds of Judaism. Yet the single question you have not asked is: Just what is a Jewish wedding? — I don't mind your writing your own text, but wouldn't you want to do this *after* you know what we call in Latin, 'the textus receptus' of the standard Jewish wedding. I would like to suggest to

you that you might want to start with what we have, and then build on it wherever and whatever you feel is necessary. In such a way you retain, with understanding, that which might be of real value in the Jewish tradition, and so also, the essence of Judaism, whatever that is.

Therefore, in summary, I think that what you are asking is simply to know more about the strange world of religion and about some of the intricacies of Judaism. I suspect you are looking for a guide, away from what appears to have been the rather mindless demands of your upbringing. I do not think you are saying that Judaism is unimportant to you, but rather that Judaism needs to demonstrate its value to the two of you. With this I entirely agree. And, honestly, I think Judaism can do that well.

I'd like to hear what you think of my thoughts on your thoughts, and I await the text you promise to send me.

Sincerely Yours, Rabbi Greenstein

Rabbi Greenstein,

It was refreshing to read that you appreciate our position and views. Your reply was very considerate and relevant to our concerns and, you are right, I did not ask the most fundamental question: Just what is a Jewish wedding? Perhaps you can help me to understand this first.

I should admit, however, that the end of May is an unlikely time for Robyn and I to be comfortable being expressly represented by Judaism. This is for two main reasons: 1) You pointed out that you have had the opportunity to spend virtually a lifetime studying, whereas Robyn and I haven't even the time from now until May 28. You see, we are busy preparing for our volunteerism trip to Ghana, West Africa, which will be our celebratory vacation in commemoration of our marriage. I am preparing for exams for my MA degree in Philosophy. Hence, it is very unlikely that by the time of our wedding we will be much different in opinion than we are today. 2) There is another point that I would call the point of 'seeking'. What I mean by the point of 'seeking' is that to seek answers one must be motivated to find them in the first place. Otherwise, the only information that people assimilate is either by chance or by indoctrination. I am not at all opposed to 'education by chance', as most of our learning comes as a consequence to living. And of course, indoctrination is something I'm sure you and I would agree to exclude. But it seems to me that, in our situation, Robyn and I will only expand our knowledge and understanding of Judaism by consulting Jewish texts and teachers, and studying. There is a very serious problem there. Neither of us is 'seeking' to do this, as we are not at all in want of religion.



This experience has confirmed my unfulfilled inclination: Never allow a religious representative to marry you, unless you are a religious individual yourself.

Culturally, I have high levels of personal gratification in my relationships and involvements with other people... Spiritually, I have established intimate connections with myself through music... Politically, I am always learning, but I already wield an incisive and pointed progressive politics— one that I have built from combining the most logical ideas of radical political thinkers with my own observations. I am a dedicated, devoted, and, to be honest, very happy person. I don't suffer from any identity crises these days, knowing full well where I stand on a vast array of issues, and what I believe in. From this position, it is hard for me to initiate the process of 'seeking' within Judaism... I mean, just what do you think I could want from it? There is so much that I am ignorant of, and I DO want to gather as much information as I am able, but I am just as interested in the suppression of the St. Thomas gospel as I am in reading the Torah. Do not forget, at my own Bar Mitzvah, I had a Cantor congratulate me for reading a text, which he was fully aware that I could not translate. I knew not what I was saying, and yet everyone was so proud that I was saying it. Such a study is of no interest to me. Especially when in the same amount of time I could read twelve books by Noam Chomsky, and learn about things that, without the world's immediate attention, will result in new waves of genocide and the neglect of so many dying from a lack of fundamental human needs. If I am interested in studying Judaism it is not at all to aspire towards being more of a Jew than I am by birth. I am interested like a historian, philosopher, and conscientious citizen.

With that said, your suspicion that I am looking for a guide, away from what was indeed a rather poor demand of my upbringing, is not the slightest bit true. I am interested in studying Jewish issues from a political and historical standpoint only. I know that it is heartbreaking and devastating for many in the Jewish community to know that I feel this way, but I simply do not feel any lack in want of religion.

Yes, please tell me 'the textus receptus' of the standard Jewish wedding. I think your suggestion is the best: to start with what you have, and then build on it. I have no desire to be offensive to you, or to ask you to do something which conflicts with yourself. On the other hand, I do not want to be symbolized as 'God' and Robyn as the 'Jewish people', as I have seen it recently done at a friend's Jewish wedding.

With deep appreciation, Richard Opalsky

Dear Rich:

You're quite right: I implied more than I intended in my e-mail to you. I implied that you are asking for more from Judaism than a mere wedding. You made it clear to me in your telephone conversation that your interest in Judaism is

rather peripheral; I understand and accept this. What I admire is the candor of your statement, and the very simple fact that you recognize it.

Without getting too deeply into other reasons why I appreciate your comments, not too mention, that is, also why I admire your MA studies in Philosophy as perhaps an entrance someday to a better understanding of the abstractions of Judaism — Without expanding, therefore, let me hasten to say only this: Perhaps we could start, when we meet, with an investigation of the actual Jewish wedding ceremony. This was really what I had intended to suggest to you from the start... And no more.

There are certain points that a Jewish wedding has to make, otherwise it isn't both Jewish and a wedding. But it is, indeed, just possible that you could find yourself not too far out of agreement with these points, or that together we could come up with some language that would be sensitive to your views. We could even choose appropriate music together, to express this language.

With again, hearty congratulations, Rabbi Greenstein

Soon after these exchanges, the three of us began to gather in his small house in Queens. With as much sympathy as possible, we all went back and forth arguing for certain ceremonial aspects to be left out, or kept in. We made concessions and so did he. In a way I felt for our old friend, thinking about his struggle to rationalize his devout faith for a lifetime — and no part of me wanted to offend him or to deprive him of his cherished world-view.

Knowing that we had agreed to certain rites that we really did not feel comfortable with, Rabbi Greenstein set out to write a personal speech to capture our uniqueness and to appease our demand for distinct representation. After so many visits filled with honest and assertive dialogue, we were sure that he knew what we wanted, and we entrusted him to deliver a speech of his own design. At its debut, which was our wedding itself, he proceeded to deliver a speech about us that was filled with further misrepresentations and more inadvertent allusions to Judaism. Our disappointment flooded our faces, and I think that he sensed our dismay. I find this part to be profoundly sad, since I do believe that he worked hard to get it right for us. In any case, it was *our wedding*, and that ceremony has been a hard pill for us to swallow ever since. But in the hierarchies of injustice, ours is but a minor story of woe. So I have accepted it as a success. After all, it did get us married. Yet, I suppose that I am still getting over it... and perhaps this article is a part of that process. ☿

Essential Media

Heart Attack #26

Heart Attack is a niche zine that, with this new issue, is both accessible and useful, and has been able to break out of its subculture and become relevant and important to the general reading public.

Heart Attack is a long running newsprint zine documenting a particular aspect of the punk/hardcore scene. They follow standard punk music zine conventions in format, organization (letters, columns, interviews, then reviews), layout, and subject matter, but have always been different. *Heart Attack* has never shied away from controversy, and of all the large punk zines out there has been the best at fostering discussion, providing a place for dialogue, and most importantly — building community.

This new issue just takes the cake. A theme issue centered around race issues and racism inside and outside the punk community, there is so much important insight and information here that you would never see in a mainstream magazine. You'll find honest and insightful essays from people about their experiences growing up in white



America, interviews with people of color who are involved in the scene, and such a large amount of material. This isn't just *one* person's experience, these are many people's experiences, all written candidly.

Sure, if you're not into the hardcore scene you have to wade through tons of advertisements and look past a bunch of scene-specific material to get to the discussions specifically about race, but it's more than worth the trouble. This magazine is important. As you read through the writings on race you can consider how these issues play out in any subculture, and in mainstream culture at large. They may be talking about the punk scene specifically at time, but the ideas and experiences are universal. PO Box 848, Goleta CA 93116. \$1.50 ppd US (\$2 Canada \$3 world)

Stay Free! #17.

Stay Free! is a magazine "focused on issues surrounding commercialism and American culture." Being that the two are fairly inextricably-bound, *Stay Free!* has a lot of ground to cover. However, if the current issue is any indication, there is no doubt that editor Carrie McLaren and crew are up to the task.

The most recent issue of *Stay Free!* includes an in-depth analysis of the recent flux of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnoses in kids and how arbitrarily the characteristics of ADHD are being applied. The issue also includes a great deal of coverage of branding, which could be roughly defined as the commodification of ideas or objects through the attachment of names to those ideas or objects with such vigor that the names themselves come to represent the objects or ideas. To hilariously illustrate a point, one writer attacks another person with the same name in another part of the country for misrepresenting his brand; one that he has spent 29 years cultivating. On the same subject, *Stay Free!* points out (with tongue in cheek) the



possibilities that brand association with people (a powerful tool, witness celebrity endorsements) could have for activists. Pictures of people being arrested in Gap sweatshirts, laying strung-out in Tommy Hilfiger jackets and hijacking planes in a Nike t-shirt all serve as examples of ways we can counteract the power of branding. The rest of the issue includes an analysis of the effectiveness of media literacy education, free speech and advertising (i.e. how did commercial advertising come to fall under "freedom of speech") and "getting fired" stories.

Years ago, readers turned to *Adbusters* for similar analyses, but these days *Stay Free!* is the one providing the lucid, relevant criticism that causes readers to stop and reflect on the effects of living in a culture permeated by corporate marketing and sponsorship. There is plenty to be gleaned from the pages of *Stay Free!*, whether you are a seasoned veteran of media criticism or someone only recently discovering what it means to be media savvy. PO Box 306, Prince St. Station, New York, NY 10012. \$4 ppd.



WHERE DO WE GO FROM

A CONVERSATION WITH MARTIN



Photo: Benoit Pepin

HERE?

SORRENDEGUY

BY JOHN GERKEN

Martin Sorrendeguy is one of those people that never seems to stop. When he's working on one thing, he's got his mind on 10 other things, and he works tirelessly to see his projects come to fruition. It's a beautiful thing, to see someone who is so passionate about what they do. He's probably best known for the band he was in, Los Crudos, and his record label, Lengua Armada. One of his latest projects is Mas Alla De Los Gritos Beyond the Screams, a video documentary about Latino involvement in the punk scene. Although it's not discussed much in this interview, there is an extensive interview with Martin about it in Maximum RockNRoll, issues 202 and 203 in Jose Palafox's column.

As we talk and I try to keep up, the conversation jumps from subject to subject. I'm reminded of the book No More Prisons by Billy Upski Wimsatt, among other things. Martin's got the same sense of youth culture solidarity, a broad outlook along with a grassroots, bottom-up approach to societal problems. It's a certain kind of brilliance that can apply common sense to complex issues, and in turn make it all seem so simple. And he's got an energy that seems to inspire everyone around him.

One day in late 1999, we sat down for a talk about the Do-It-Yourself ethic, independent culture, and community.

John: So what would you say, in any way that you can think of, DIY means to you?

Martin: That's hard. I think independence, I think certain words. Control. Certain things I think of, self-determination. I think also of it being contagious. People see the possibilities of DIY and they want to do it also. Inspiration. It's interesting, it's a thing of example. I think of DIY, some kid sees what you did and thinks, "I can do that too." That simple thing of possibilities. I think that when people start realizing they can do things in another way, another route, they'll take it.

It's vital now, in this day where it seems like everything is being co-opted, everything is being bought out, all the mom and pop shops. And people are really getting tired of it. That means more and more and more people are starting to say, "Hey, this is what happened to me, and you too, and these people too!" I saw some stuff from the WTO protests in Seattle and workers were saying, "What we're pissed about here, the workers in Mexico are pissed about too." And there's this connection being made, between the workers, saying "people in poor countries are being fucked too, poor workers are getting fucked!" It's the same shit. The guy who owns that company here owns it over there, too. It's the same people. So let's make that connection. You talk about globalization and how it's affecting people. Hearing everyday workers say, "fuck this! That Mexican worker, it's not his fault, they're in the same boat as I am, it's the same asshole that's fucking us both. Let's fuck it up." That's awesome.

Imagine, all their lives these people have been believing or have been taught about this nation, this great nation. All of a sudden they realize it's the same nation that has betrayed them and manipulated them. That will destroy them. That's beyond a rude awakening.

And to me, it's all connected to the DIY mentality, DIY in practice, in how you produce. It's all a part of that. It's so hard not to get off on these other subjects, because it's all connected. Communication is vital, and seeing what people have done, and what people do. It's interesting.

That's what I'm excited about, people taking it beyond what we have now. Everyone I know, we've taken this DIY thing, and we don't keep it to just records or shows. That's what I'm really excited about. People expressing that, what it means to them in a really broad sense.

I agree, if you have this whole DIY approach to band stuff, why can't you apply it to other things? Extending it, going further with it. That's really important, because we underestimate the capabilities and the pos-

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sibilities that we have. There is a lot of underestimation. You know, we're not a bunch of dumb kids who just want to rock out to music. It has that element, but there's a lot more to it. We're intelligent; we do possess a lot of power because of our knowledge about doing it ourselves and that approach that we have to things. That's a really powerful thing. That sense of DIY within you, that ability to just walk into somewhere new and just say "I'll survive, I'll survive anywhere." Anyplace you go, you can figure things out, find people; tap into these resources that most everyday people wouldn't have. You are in a certain position, you have this power, you can do something, you can get around.

And that's so amazing, this sense that we can be giving each other. What some people might see as a much smaller thing, like doing zines and records, but through doing that, building that sense up that yes, we can do this, and it has gone on to bigger things and spread into all aspects of our lives.

And it's an enormous network, it's huge. If we opened up a space today, I believe by tomorrow people in Japan or parts of Europe would know about it. That's the kind of thing it is, it spreads like wildfire. If you're doing a project, people know what you're doing. People will find out, and that's a good thing. That's a good thing because you're going to have people talking about it other places, possibilities of support for what you're doing. If it's not monetary, then at least people saying hey, that's fucking rad, giving suggestions and possibilities of doing things a different way and just learning. Like we talked about, you do projects and sometimes your project will fail, but who cares? You go on, you do it again, you keep doing it. Nothing's going to work perfectly at first. It's fucking amazing to just see it happen.

We're in this time now where even world politics, the WTO demonstrations and all that, all of this stuff in the past couple of years is so motivating. You start to realize that this is possible. You think about what's happening in other countries, wow, the people just got fed up and said fuck this, and made something happen or prevented something from happening. And as this keeps happening, it's a spark, there's a fire still burning, it gives people a sense of, "Let's go!"

I think about how we (punk kids) didn't invent DIY, and it's time that we get out there and get connected with all of the other people who feel

this way.

We didn't invent it, but we gave it a real kick in the ass. I wouldn't be talking about these things if it wasn't for the punk scene. I don't think. I wouldn't have this perspective that I have, I wouldn't have been able to really envision these possibilities if it wasn't for me having contact with so many people, experiencing so much through this scene of ours. Because there are a lot of brilliant people involved. I get upset when kids say, "Fuck punk, it does nothing." I say, no, you do nothing. You have walked away from this, you have chosen to criticize it.

Whereas personally I feel like when I have criticisms, I think you keep with it if you care about it.

It's not even about the music necessarily. I don't care if you don't like thrash music, that's not the issue. But what are you going to do? Who are the critics of it? Are they people who have abandoned this long ago and they're fucking yuppies and they have this self-hate reaction of fuck punk? Because really they became what they were so angry about as a young person. So what's up with that? Or are people just stepping out to new things? Like if you became a full-on activist, you're organizing things, cool. But you probably wouldn't have gotten there if this punk thing wasn't in your life. I get a little bothered when people do that. There are people who are still involved in the scene and have very valid arguments, and they're doing things. I think it's great.

I'm reminded of something that Mimi Nguyen wrote to the effect of her not being the punk that she was. That she's standing with one foot in the punk scene, and one out of it, and her head turned in other directions. But it's where I come from, I'm still planted there. In so many ways, so many things, you have to keep a connection to where you've been, where you come from. But also be looking in new directions.

The thing is, we've established ourselves, and so do we just keep on repeating this within the punk thing? We have shows and put out records. We want to maintain that because it's fun for us, but what else can we do? Let's do things that are going to open up that bridge between who we are and the community around us.

We can not be naïve and think that things are just going to happen, that people are just going to embrace what we're doing. Say someone in the community, the local politician or whoever, says, "Oh, these punk kids..." Saying punk people, or punk rockers, has really negative con-



middle photo: Fabio Brienza; end photos: self-portraits by Martin Sorrendeguy

notations still. People don't think, "Oh, punks, really cool people!" They think drugs and alcohol and violence. It still carries that stigma.

We have to do things to have people in the community get to know us, know who we are. It's easy here, if we open the space here I know people in this community, which is cool, but that doesn't mean it's going to be embraced because there are people that maybe don't like what I do in the community. So it's fine, but those are obstacles that we are going to have to learn to deal with and we are going to have to be very clever. They're going to use their little fucking snide-ass tactics to try to make us fall apart. We have to be really intelligent, we can't just snap at everything when we're working together collectively. We have to be very observant of what is going on, because they'll try to shut the space down. I think about the arguments and the things that are going to come against us, how we'll deal with this. Because I have this dream, get my friends together and do all this stuff. But don't think it's going to be all that easy, because it's going to be a lot of work. So our tactic is gaining trust in the community.

Yeah, because they have things to teach us, and we have things to share with them, and maybe this sense of collectivity and that we really can do the things that we want to do, maybe the community around us will become a part of that. And they can be showing us things, that's so important to connect with the larger community.

Just because we're punks does it mean that we don't communicate with the hip hop kids from down the street? Just because I'm a punk does it mean that I don't know my old lady neighbor from across the street? She might be just as radically punk in mind as I may be. Does it mean I have to divide because she doesn't listen to some fucking thrash shit? No, that's stupid. So what if she doesn't know who Discharge is, that doesn't mean she's not fucking right on. I think that's what we have to start doing, start saying, "It's cool man, that hip hop kid down the street is really pissed off about stuff. And we were talking about how fucked up this is. And we found a common ground."

It's impossible for me to have this separation. The kid in this neighborhood is affected by almost exactly what I have been through.

It's these divisions that we keep insisting on putting up between people that is stupid, it's self-destructive. We can get beyond that. Those are the tactics that people have been using against us forever and we hate it, so why do we turn around and do it to ourselves? I don't want to

do that.

On so many levels we have to make connections with what's happening around us and in this world, and make that connection to our own lives and our own city and how we play a part in this.

What about the importance of connecting to your community wherever you are, wherever you move? Even in Chicago, there are lots of kids who don't know anyone, even within the larger punk community.

M: That's why I want to do this *No Show*. I want to do this big potluck, show the video I just did, poetry, have this big non-musical stuff related to punk. Maybe someone could do spoken word, have food. It will allow space where there's not loud music going on, people can talk to each other, meet each other, it would be really nice — and a good way for people to meet up. And people can just do their thing, build a larger community. There are a lot of new people who have just moved here in the past year. We have to start bringing it together.

In California, even though Proposition 187 (a measure that prohibited health care and education to anyone who was even suspected of being an illegal immigrant) got tied up in the courts saying it's unconstitutional, that shit would have passed. Why the fuck is that shit passing? What's going on? There should be a lot of work being done about stuff like that. There are people talking about reinstating that. And now there's Prop. 21 in California. That shit is so anti-youth, and they're trying to turn it into this anti-gang thing. It's anti-youth straight across the board. And if that passes, what the fuck are people doing in California? What are all these kids doing? Because if you have the hip hop culture talking about it and punk culture talking about it, those are the two strongest youth cultures around right now. Do your work! Punk, do your work! Metal kids can do it too. Everybody needs to just do this. Talk about it, it's not anti-gang, it's just anti-youth.

I was thinking about how even in this city I can probably find in one area, in a neighborhood like this one, more spaces for adult entertainment than there are for youth. And I think that's across the board, anywhere you go in this country there is more for adults to do, more places for them to go than for young people. Things are not set up for youth.

Especially if you're going to come up with ways to restrict them, you've got to have something else set up then.

But let's just complain about how they all just fucking hang out and they get drunk on weekends. Give me a fucking break. There have to be alternatives, and everyone wants to target young people as a problem. But there's nothing for them to do, nowhere for them to go, nobody's supporting the things they are doing that are positive. We have to look at that. And these are things that I will use as arguments come the time that we have a space to be doing something with young people, because I'm sure there will be some public forum or something, or we'll throw one. And say, in this neighborhood alone, there are something like a hundred bars, and then this many things for young people to do. Where's the fucking alternative? We're doing something positive for young people, and this asshole wants to close us down. And then he has the nerve to complain about gang problems, and how he's going to get rid of this and that. Look at what's happening!

They're using these "issues" as distractions from the real problems and solutions that work.

They are distractions, so we just have to go right at it, put the facts right on the table, this is what's up. These people, that's why I say we have to be really clever when we're getting this shit done. Just be right on it and show this is what we're doing. This is what these people want, why they want to close us down. These are the consequences of what they want.

There is just so much that could be done, and I always think about where I'm at, here there are so many people. A lot of single mothers with kids, they have families, it's really hard for them to get stuff done. Or recent immigrants, it's hard for them, they don't know how things function in this society. Maybe they have trouble understanding what their phone bill says; they don't understand why they're getting charged so much. They don't have that know-how, they think that somebody tells them something and they have to do this. And it's not that way, you don't have to do a lot of things. I think the space could be used as a center for simple things like that. Just to help people out, getting information for them. There are so many different things that can be done to help people with simple things. As a punk, how many people in recent years have gotten into studying and their degrees are education? Well, come to class. You're working at the public schools, that's cool, why don't you come in on a Sunday and give a class on something, some kind of tutoring? That's the beginnings of something that could develop into something even bigger.

Imagine that, there's a bunch of punks that are teachers. My dream would be to have a school, independent of the state, a private school that is opened up by activists and punk people that all have education degrees or whatever, and they're teaching or whatever. Imagine that! And it's run independently so that when shit goes down, like that whole 187 thing, we don't play that game. We will take kids because they're kids and educate them. We don't care if they just got off a boat, crossed the border or whatever, they're coming to our school. Education is about teaching and learning, it's not about excluding and it's not about privilege.

And you get that going in your community and a bunch of people hear about it and it just grows and grows. And there definitely have been movements like that over the years, and we can look at those and learn from that. We can take what we can from that, for what we want to do. If you're doing something and it's really working, it's coming together



photo: Benoit Pepin

MY DREAM WOULD BE TO HAVE A SCHOOL, INDEPENDENT OF THE STATE, A PRIVATE SCHOOL THAT IS OPENED UP BY ACTIVISTS AND PUNK PEOPLE THAT ALL HAVE EDUCATION DEGREES ... IMAGINE THAT! AND IT'S RUN INDEPENDENTLY SO THAT WHEN SHIT GOES DOWN, LIKE THAT WHOLE 187 THING, WE DON'T PLAY THAT GAME. WE WILL TAKE KIDS BECAUSE THEY'RE KIDS AND EDUCATE THEM. WE DON'T CARE IF THEY JUST GOT OFF A BOAT, CROSSED THE BORDER OR WHATEVER, THEY'RE COMING TO OUR SCHOOL. EDUCATION IS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING, IT'S NOT ABOUT EXCLUDING AND IT'S NOT ABOUT PRIVILEGE.

and it's functioning, I think people take note of that. People always say, "Oh, it's impossible, the money or whatever." Oh come on, it's not impossible! Nobody says you have to have a fucking computer per child to have something work. It doesn't have to work that way. In poor countries they can have a class under a tree, the teacher's got a piece of chalk and a board outside. Why can't we set up class? That's ridiculous, this idea that we have to have an abundance of money. But when people do notice that something is functioning, which is my original point, you will have people that will donate money, no strings attached. There are people with money that don't want to donate to a lot of organizations because they don't like that they compromise so much, or they work so closely with the government or something. And when you're doing something that's totally grassroots, DIY, they're into it! And we were talking about all these new money kids, they have computer jobs, a lot of them are punk kids and they're making sixty grand and up. And we're not saying give us your money, but hey man, if you're ever thinking you would like to support something, well hey, when something like that gets going, think about it. And you can be specific, say I want to donate to this specifically, I'll donate a G4, or I'll pay for electrical work, or whatever. You tell people what you would like the money to go to, supplies or donate a PA or whatever. It's not impossible.

We should put people in that position. Put bands in that position, bands that are really big, say, "Do a benefit show." How much is that going to hurt you? Help out once in awhile. Don't just let them get away, going off in their little world and content because they're making tons of money, because they're in a position where they can do a lot of stuff. Bands that want to make money off what they do, it's cool, but it doesn't hurt to give back a little.

I love talking about this, getting all excited, because I get off on it! I get all excited, but the thing is, let's just get it done. The first steps have to be taken. ♪



The Wake fiction by Al Burian

The refrigerator in my apartment has broken. Unfortunate. But predictable, alas: the tired old goat had been bleating its pained moans of resignation in relation to the final defrost for some weeks now, like a terminally ill influenza patient sent home to live out their final, tortured days in the company of loved ones. One could grow accustomed to the rattling helicopter-like sounds of the fan's out-of-whack trajectory — it blended in appropriately with the screaming of police sirens, the muted seronk of SWAT teams' ultimatums delivered via bullhorn to entrenched burrows of white supremacists and acid-manufacturing cartels holed up in the surrounding dinge — but the sudden horrid nocturnal squeals of agony released by the fridge, the result of some belt grinding down, reverberating in the middle of the night, would still cause me to bolt upright on occasion, clutching my hand to my side, awoken from dark dreams to the sure notion that my appendix had burst with a porcine bellow.

And then one night, suddenly, the eerie sound of quiet. Even the asthmatic whup-whup-whup of the Kelvinator's geriatric helicopter blades had abruptly ceased, and there was only an infinite void of sorrowful silence, interrupted after a few moments by the loud snap of a mousetrap springing shut, and then the substitute whup-whup-whup of the rodent's epileptic death-jig on the hard tile floor. Then nothing. I lay in bed for a few moments, eyes open and staring at the ceiling, before, with a sigh, throwing back the covers, inserting feet into slippers and blearily trudging to the kitchen to examine the battlefield, strewn with the carcasses of the dead, both friend and foe. On the way there, I grabbed a set of fireplace tongs to aid in the distasteful task of removing the rodent corpse.

I found the kitchen in much the state I had expected: a thin haze of acrid smoke, final flatulence of the fridge, already spreading an electric burnt-wire smell throughout the kitchen and into the apartment. Center stage, the unfortunate pest, neck snapped. I clamped the trap within the jaws of the tongs and, earnestly trying to avoid processing the sight of the flapping, limp body still connected to it, hurried to the garbage to deposit the self-contained package of executioner and executionee. Theoretically, these traps can be used and re-used, but I am not thrifty enough to overcome the cowardliness which prevents me from prying open the metal jaw, removing the tiny body, and then properly sanitizing the death trap so that the mouse's many brethren will not notice the stain of blood, the smell of their comrade's final moment of fear. Perhaps this is hypocrisy and weakness on my part. But this is a disposable age, a cowardly and morally corrupt age, where the death of a living thing is a momentary inconvenience and the death of a hulking metal container for cooling beverages and keeping lettuce crisp can complicate and embroil the lives of many, for days to come.

I live on the second story of a three-floor building. The apartment

above mine is inhabited by a young couple who seem to be pleasant enough, although I suspect they are drug addicts of some sort and in addition display all the sanitary habits and scheduling preferences typical of vampirism. I seldom see them, usually on the stairs in the evenings as they make their way out the door on shaky legs to procure a fix or sell themselves in the streets or whatever it is that people in that age bracket and lifestyle do in the evenings. Typically, they are quite cordial, though clearly in somewhat of a rush, and small talk is kept to a minimum.

The downstairs neighbor is another story altogether. My abode sits atop a dilapidated storefront, which, most unfortunately, houses a strange and very makeshift art gallery, the brainchild of my neighborhood nemesis, a withered old hippy named Floyd. How Floyd has managed to convince the landlord to dedicate so large a chunk of real estate to so sketchy a venture is beyond my comprehension, but they do seem to get along well, which may be symptomatic of my landlord's neurotic complexes. I fear that Floyd and the landlord are old friends from some primordial collegiate bra-burning seminar or sit-in or smoke-out.

My landlord is, it must be said, a gentle and decent man. His name is Pear, and though I have never seen a birth certificate, it is easy to imagine that the name is his actual parentally-chosen one. If we can extrapolate from the contemporary Pear an imagined newborn infant version of this same person, smaller and considerably more hairless, it is indeed quite probable that in his first few moments of existence Pear looked like just that — an oversized, slightly over-ripe pear. Time has made him a gargantuan woolly mammoth of a man, but his body shape is still precisely that of the fruit of his namesake. He is also, it is curious to note, a Socialist, part of his gentle and fruity nature, though something which makes his position as private property owner and de facto slumlord a bit ideologically tricky.

I theorize that the resulting guilt and/or identity crisis caused by this dichotomy in Pear's character accounts for the presence of Floyd, who is no doubt using the lever of bourgeois guilt to his great advantage. In all fairness, Pear does receive a great value for his guilt through Floyd's public displays of insanity. The main storefront window of the gallery tends to feature a rotating set of installation pieces by Floyd himself, mostly political and intentionally offensive in nature. Exactly what persuasion of political conviction his art is expressing is debatable, since the general theme seems to be free-form paranoid delusion spanning both the extremes of right and left wing fantasy, and the target audience for offending seems to be anyone passing who does not directly fit into the category of "blind." In addition, the Floyd gallery is host to all manner of unseemly activity and has a full calendar of weekly events, from Monday night conspiracy theory rantings by a panel of psychologically deranged veterans (always taped for later broadcast on public access television), to Wednesday night hemp legalization committee meetings, which tend to seep up through the vents and fill my living room with smoke, and on to the most dreaded weekday evening, Men's Sensitivity and Inner Child Awareness Drum Circle Thursdays. Weekends are usually a time for Floyd to reflect and gather his thoughts, blast Led Zeppelin, and abuse his dog.

"Floyd," I beseech him one morning as I pass him, sitting in the doorway of the Floyd Gallery. "Cease and desist the torture of Floyd Jr. The poor mutt has done nothing to warrant your pummeling. His cries are keeping me awake at night and fraying my already worn nerves."

"Wha— hey, it's chill, man. It's cool. No one getting hassled down here man," he mumbles from the fog that is his waking state.

It has been two days now since the refrigerator gave up the ghost. Still no word from Pear, and my fruitless (no pun intended) phoning grows more persistent, my messages on his machine by degree more strained.

"The ice-box is now thawing all over the kitchen floor, threatening to seep through the tile and make the entire apartment even less livable than it currently is," I explain to the somber hiss of cassette tape, "but that wouldn't concern an imperialist such as yourself. No, no —

enjoy the fruits of the workers' hard-earned rental extortions. Bask in the sun, sipping whatever fruity beverage your opulent refrigerator provides, at my expense. One can expect no less from the ruling class."

Floyd, meanwhile, has been busying himself below with the preparation of his newest assault on the public's sense of taste and decency. I hear the noises of construction, hammering, sawing, welding, at all hours, and, since these activities seem to provide a reprieve for the dog, I resolve not to complain about this state of affairs, even when the sounds of his artistry reverberate deep into the night.

Monday is the usual incoherent pontificating, with shoes being banged on tables in Kruschevian invocations to applause — Tuesday welding and sawing resumes. Today I pass Floyd again, on the stoop, flipping distractedly through a newspaper. I inquire as to when the opening for his newest creation will take place. He looks up squintily from his paper, no doubt startled at my uncharacteristic interest in his artwork. From behind sooty little John Lennon spectacles he surveys me. There is a bit of egg yolk in his beard, left over from breakfast, possibly this morning's or one within the past few days. Tomorrow, he informs me. Of course. Men's Sensitivity and Inner Child Awareness Drum Circle Thursday. I shudder and make my way down the street.

Sirens sound, night descends; the dull thunder of a battering ram pounding away at the door of the apartment building two doors down. "This is the police! Surrender your weapons and lay on the floor with your hands over your heads!" The bassy report of shots being fired from the window, glass shattering.

The street is alive with activity; the 24-hour record store oozes Reggae out on to the sidewalk, as people hang limply in the doorway bobbing their heads in the dull stupor of concentration, of immersion. At the sight of the SWAT team fumigating the white supremacist acid ring from the neighboring premises, the Rastafarian shopkeepers exchange a quick, communicative glance with the stragglers in the doorway, who quickly slip inside and allow the iron grate to slide down and —boom— click — lock them in. Now the shop is a sealed up drum, impervious and rattling rhythmically to the bass frequencies inside.

I'm feeling nauseous and weak, my lymph nodes having swollen overnight to the size of softballs. Something is very wrong with me: I have come down with the flu, and a debilitating head-cold. Still no sign of Pear.

"The situation is growing dire," I pronounce solemnly, to the impassive answering machine. "Conditions cannot continue thus. The masses are on the verge of bloody revolt."

I make my way downstairs and pound on Floyd's door. He answers, dressed in a grass skirt and a wreath of flowers, his naked chest and pale, mule-like face smeared with mud.

"Uh—" I am taken aback by his bizarre costume. He looks down, as if noticing his attire for the first time himself, and then back up at me. He nods, and says, "Uh-huh, man." It is an affirmative uh-huh, an assertion that all is as it should be here in the universe tonight.

"Look...Floyd...I'm feeling really ill, I think I have the flu or something. I'm just wondering if you could try to keep it somewhat down, volume-wise. There's the whole police raid going on in the neighborhood and I'll be trying to rest up a bit — you think, just to be neighborly...?"

He contemplates my clammy, sweat-mottled form. Shakes his head slowly. "No can do," he says.

"No can do?" I repeat, incredulously.

"I've got a lot of folks coming out for this, man.... It's all about gettin' in touch with the inner primal sensitive child, and that can't have any limitations on it, that's just gotta happen the way it happens."

I nod slowly to indicate my understanding. Floyd has erected a sandwich board type of sign which stands at a triangular angle in front of his door. "This way to the art," it reads, and an arrow points the pedestrian inside. I walk over to it with methodical deliberation. Floyd watches me intently from behind his John Lennon spectacles. I look

back at him, and then kick the sign over. It clatters into the street. I turn back to Floyd and extend my middle finger.

"Uncool," he says. We stare each other down for a moment before I storm inside.

Pear is huffing and wheezing his way up the stairs, a dilapidated but presumably functional refrigerator in tow on a hand truck which he awkwardly hauls up, step by step. I watch from my doorway, unable to be of assistance on account of a history of herniation and such.

"Whew," he says, wiping his brow at the top of the stairs.

Once the new unit has been installed in the place of the old one, what contents have not been lost to rot and decaying transfused from one to the other, and everything checked to be in working order, poor Pear mounts the lifeless husk of the old refrigerator on his hand truck and begins to laboriously wheel his way back out the door.

"I'm sorry about the delay," he apologizes earnestly. "It's just been very busy lately. You know how things get this time of year..."

"Power to the people," I say as he crosses the threshold, and then close the door behind him. I have turned and am making my way back to the kitchen to further inspect the new appliance, when, from the hall, I hear the sound of what seems to be a tremendous explosion, followed by a series of thundering, reverberating booms. I rush back to the door, fling it open, and find Pear standing outside, still at the top of the staircase, looking down the stairway with a gaze of mortification. He looks at me and grins sheepishly. "Whoops," he says.

The old refrigerator has tumbled forward, off of the hand truck and down the flight of stairs, cleaving a path of destruction on its ill-fated way down to the street. Several steps have been damaged, and large, scraping gouges along the walls mark the path of the refrigerators' descent. In addition, one handrail has been thoroughly demolished. The fridge rests against the front door, its own door flapping open absurdly and a rancid brine seeping from the crisper into the foyer. The front door of the building has been torn from one hinge, and dangles from the top hinge only.

"Well," says Pear. We stand together in silence, surveying the scene.

"I guess I'll be back," he mutters. And with that, he wheels the hand truck down the half-demolished staircase and lumbers out the door, leaving behind the carcass of the appliance, absurdly bleeding brine onto the welcome mat below.

Days have passed with no sign of Pear. The landing is a treacherous hazard zone, and I must gingerly make my way down the splintered wreckage of a staircase each morning and then back up to my abode without the aid of the now demolished bannister. I am nimble enough to do it, though it colors my days with the taint of oppressive sub-standard dwelling malaise. The nocturnal drug addicts above me, on the other hand, I worry about. It is easy to conceive of one or both of them, shambling anxiously down the darkened corridor, stumbling and breaking their pale skinny necks on the way down. The fireplace tongs would not suffice to remove the corpses, and my ability to focus past the horror of the everyday depravity and death surrounding me would be taxed to the limit. In addition, the front door, swinging tenuously from the top hinge like the sordid saloon entrance in some nightmarish Western does not inspire a sense of home security, nor does it provide the tenants with residential morale or pride in rentership.

But worst of all, the refrigerator has disappeared. Like a hyena, Floyd has claimed his prize in the night. I can hear him now, hammering and sawing away, like some demented Dr. Frankenstein bent on bringing the poor innocent appliance back to a grisly second life, reincarnated as horrendous art object. Let the dead rest, Floyd. The indignity is just too much to bear.

These are the sorts of observations I have been storing archivally on the hissing audio tape of Pear's answering machine. But despite my pleas, there has so far been no response. c



Green Card Blues

*A not-so-quiet tale of
Love, Law and Bureaucracy*

by Michael D. Amitin

The world was our oyster, even after a honeymoon spin around Brittany's orgasmic teal shores.

So we packed up and said *au revoir* to the city of lighters where perfumed guys and dolls whistle past smoked-out brasseries and neighborhood stores on Chinese roller blades, and chain-linked franchise eyeshores look on in ever-increasing, salivating numbers.

DeGaulled in gridlock for hours and facing a devilish 11-hour ride over the deep blue sea, we anticipate a hearty Bordeaux, while wondering why some ingenious airline company whiz kid think-tanker hadn't come up with a nonstop from Charles DeGaulle Airport to the Betty Ford Clinic — serious promotion material for a budding team manager.

Two hours of life on the runway would have any Boddhisattva crying uncle. So what'll it be, Air France? On recent trips they've served up such riveting flicks as Mueho DeNiro's thriller "Ronin," and John Revolting's "Michael." Then there's always those priceless tape loops of generic loony tunes to look forward to, and of course ...airplane food.

Anyway, The Plan went like this:

We'd return to California, swish through the necessary INS hoops, settle into our chipped Rockwell painting, and be left to the simple task of having Valcrie adapt to the subtle differences between La Vie de Coco Chanel and horsy Kagel Canyon, California, population 950.

Perched in the foothills on the eastern rim of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley, this lovely community's demographic is primarily Timbaktu cowboys who play holiday horseshoes, and whose bedroom window is more likely to look out at a fossil fuel cemetery than a fer forge balcony. Rusted cars piled atop each other like retired wrestlers. Campbell soup cans are shot more often than wanton glances along the Seine.

It was a long way from the street life of terriers to the night life of raccoons who came down from the nearby foothills to play nocturnal roller derby in the attic directly above our matrimonial sheets; from condom ads gracing bustling boulevards to the "bitch parking only" sign hanging from neighbor Don Strudelmeyer's garage door. "We'll ace this in no time," I pitch like a lame-ass Tony Robbins sales affirmation.

The decision to live in California was based around the fact that my parents were getting on in years, and having had one of two brothers make a premature exit from earth after a rough n' tumble bout with cancer, it made sense to support the American side of our family, putting French Dreams on *le back burner*.

Like many among us, we assumed the matrimony march placed us squarely on the inside track in the race for Sammy's great green card.

"Well you're married, she's legal, right?" was the hit refrain.

What with France being the fascination du jour, we'd surely have a lingerie leg up over the Braceros slithering their way under the barb to cross into Copland. Our Euro pedigree certainly qualified us as bright prospects for the great commerce feeding frenzy even if we were a few inches shy of say, a coveted NBA or CIA player. We were wrong.

Due to the influx of "convenience marriages" over the past few decades, it seems the Government mules decided to crack down (while discovering a great source of revenue) on those blissful couples wishing to nest on its lovely shores.

California Dreamin'

It was one of those classic nondescript October days in L.A. that tanned news weather sailors rave about as "great weather," featuring dry, gray and still. We took our place at the end of a long slow line that wound around the downtown INS building like a hissing sidewinder. I had driven by this same line for years, glancing vacantly at the disposable community of pariahs giggling and waiting their turn for a chance

... legally in the belly (read *bowels*) of the economic whale. Now a chance to feel what the sidewalk heat might feel like under their watered shoes.

After receiving the race forms, we took our long shot back to Horseville, and stared blankly into the bureaucracy handicap, knowing the odds were slim to none we could circumvent the long run.

Valerie held back her tears. A million miles from home, she merely desired a berth in the stars and stripes work derby. Citizenship she'd leave to those 4th of July flag-waving inductees who mug for the camera.

Sterling encouragement came from disparate quarters. My brother's friend, a Swiss immigrant who'd long since poked her hole into the American cheese as a psychotherapist, offered this gem:

"It will be a long, hard fight, but in the end you will win, and it will be worth it. You may get a work permit after months of trying, but a green card ... forget it ... years away."

Reality Check

So America exports Dioxin, Dursban, and a host of other lovely carcinogens to lively up the lavender French fields that stretch between Mickey and Mc Doo, and then hold a perfume-tongued Parisian hostage at INS central because she defaults to trade in La Vie En Rose for a chance to run with the Yankee hounds in the shadow of Sheriff Ben Hur.

We ship our factories to Mexico where labor comes at a great discount, and then prop up 187 to bust 'em who'd rather work for six bucks an hour here than for two bucks an hour for the same company south of the border (cue Woody Guthrie).

By night we made sweet and sour offerings to the gods, and by day we clasp onto France Service, a monthly journal-directory for French folk wandering in the celluloid desert. The quest was on for that special soul of letters who could sneak us in through the stately back door.

With quixotic foresight and infinite moxie, the cash-lite brigade packed their go-for-broke files and charged forward.

The Easy Way...

We awoke to find ourselves in the South African legal lion den of Benny Moolah and Company, quickly discovering the INS to be an equal opportunity deflator. Green pastures of plenty had dead presidents holding the trust deed to dreamland.

Moolah's lobby was filled with busy bodies, and valium-laced clocks. After a hearty wait, Chas. Wolfenmucker, the company's hook-and-chatter man, invited us into his economically correct cubicle. Selling green cards like used cars, this gopher jokester spelled it out for us in vague, uncertain terms, then closed his spiel with a Sheriff Potts for-you-my-friend smile.

These guys figure we've spent a fair amount of time consorting with the pigeons of Place Des Vosges, and are ready for the prime pluck.

We're sweating account balance bullets, and Wolfie (buttering our bored baguette) starts with the funnies about his many exotic and illuminating voyages to the City of Lights, vignettes which are packed with the drama and intrigue of a Sunday paper travel feature. Eventually he gets around to the "it." Three thousand is the magic figure here. Deliver

in three easy installments, and the key to the big green palace'll be yours. Slam dance couple number one.

That they may change the rules along the way, and turn what in France might have been a four month affair into a two-three year marathon for the walking wounded was of course not mentioned during this wining and dining.

Back at the ranch we sat and did the figuring: 3K multiplied by a sea of hungry transplants, a few hundred-buck bumps every now and then for what they call a work authorization renewal, a fee for the annual "advanced parole" renewals, a little shuffling here and there, and you get yourself an office with a view in Pacific Palisades overlooking the gleaming blue Pacific. Pretty suite racket.

Work authorization? Advanced parole? The lady didn't even swipe a chunk of bread. The work authorization card gives you the right to temporary employment, while you wait for the interviews (which we are informed later have been moved up a year because of the deluge of wish-upon-a-star immigrants). Aptly named, the advanced parole entitles the lucky recipient limited travel rights outside America's big friendly gated community, for such threatening pleasures as visiting loved ones afar.

Moolah and Associates promise that we'll have Valerie working within two months. Three and a half months later, I call and squawk.

Big honcho himself returns my call with big scream standard, "How dare you challenge the integrity of my practice!" Gotta love it. Vaudeville in the

key of growl. "Why I've helped hundreds of people, you don't know what the fuck you're talking about... Why I've been ripping snookered suckas like you off without a hitch for over a decade in L.A."

When the jockeying subsided, the temporary work card arrived in our decapitated mailbox a few days later. With an INS-inscribed axe hovering over her time clock, Valerie punched in at the front desk of a new life in the big hotel. Her parents had raised their kids to be reverent towards America, even while defiling the comical tube-sock tourists who showed up by the droves to get a perfunctory taste of Mother Frog.

Months later we decided to break out to Paris, flashing our hot advanced parole number to the authorities (who could give a shit) along the way. Aside from the fact that Moolah

wasn't shy about his invoices, he forgot to include in our special package any caveat regarding airport protocol for temp citizens.

On the heels of the 11 hour crunch at 34,000 feet, the parolee not only gets to crawl through customs, but is invited over to a special INS depot, where it's not unusual to be loved, interrogated and detained for hours. As exhilarating as it was, however, the homey Depot couldn't hold a candle to the hot air we got in Philly on a subsequent trip, where Valerie was strip searched down to her goose bumps, grilled by cheese steak cops about her travel, threatened to be sent back to France, and detained to where she had to manage a serious scramble to catch her wings back to L.A.

Next up: Moolah sends us a bill for 800 smackers (due in advance) for the upcoming work authorization and advanced parole renewals. We get it, a price increase... other insignificant tripe that must've slipped Wolfenmucker's busy mind during our exciting courtship.

Snatching matters in our own hand, we head down to the INS, taking our chances in the snaky smog fumes. We end up paying a C note for the extension, and walk away whistling Dixie.



from Paris...



We did the figuring again. At a hundred dollars a pop multiplied by a few million budding Americans? Not a bad idea to string 'em a long for a few extra renewal years. The INS... a naturalized service indeed.

On our way back to the car, a steel drummer serenaded the pseudo-street life with the theme from the *Godfather*. A kid in his dad's pork pie is selling Elian Gonzales wind up dolls. Turn the screw, and the Cuban boy cries out his desire to stay in America. Knowing that our days as cogs in Benny Moolah's next Bentley wheel are winding down, we march down Los Angeles Street like Deucalion and Pyrra.

We decided to take over Moolah's chores, thereby saving him the trouble and expense of sending an illegal immigrant at five bucks an hour to wait in line. We're expert line dancers by now.

Our tilted rural mailbox continued to be the willing receptacle for renewal updates, and then... whoa Trigger. "The FBI requests your presence at a joint called the Riverside Center," and we guess it ain't for a picnic. Everyone wants in on the act. Surely, you jest, disciples in Hooverville. There must be some misunderstanding. Turns out this is some Federal fingerprint foreplay leading up to the penultimate adventure, the bell lap of the green card race, the exciting mini-series known as "The Interviews."

Stay tuned for episode two, where great brother asks such illuminating questions as: "What color panties does your wife wear every third Thursday in March?" and "Does your husband have any distinguishing marks?" ☿

...to Kagel Canyon, *Lés Contrast!*



YESTERDAY

by Ben Fogelson

It doesn't matter what you do in life, as long as you hold yourself responsibly.

Monday, August 22, three days after my father's birthday, I'm driving him to the airport so he can fly to his Berlin lover. Dad tells me he's looking for a new home. I miss him immediately.

I ask, "It's really just your work that keeps you from moving to San Francisco, isn't it? Or Seattle, or Portland?"

He replies that he can't afford the Bay Area. He says, "Umm, yea, the work, you know, it's going so well. I'm not going to leave it."

When we get to the curb outside the airport, like we've done so many times in the past, I take one bag and he takes one. up to the counter. Every other time for the last two years since I've moved back home, it's been a tradition that I'd carry both bags.

Once he's established a place in the empty line, we hug for a moment, and it's not like a good childhood hug.

"I love you," I say, and then I turn my back and walk to the car.

Pulling out the long driveway, I keep looking in my rearview mirror, half expecting him to run out of the glass turnstile and wave his arms for me to stop, but that doesn't happen. There's a long flat stretch by the airport, and I take his luxury sedan to up over a hundred.

Tuesday, August 23, I can't wait to get done working at the kindergarten so I can dress up with James and go to the sawdust track.

James and I, fairly identical in bodily appearance, dark hair, 5' 10", dark eyes, devilish grins, both wear tight red nylon jogging shorts, slightly baggy black t-shirts, and neon-yellow fanny packs, with white shoes. When we get to the beginning of the thousand meter loop, where the water fountain dribbles, where the metal and plexiglass shelter sits vandalized, and where the set-stretching boulders plod motionless through their silent existence, James takes off hurriedly along the track to the left by the slough, and I wait in the reeds for several minutes. Then I follow, as quick as my puffy legs can take me without sprinting. To the right of us is the marsh.

(continued next page)

s lunch hour in the running capital of the world. There's a couple tall, very sinuously skinny, almost middle-aged men marathoning their way around the track with their long-striding glides of years of practice. It may be assumed they have egos like the rest of us, these fellows, and that assumption is what makes this enjoyable. I know the first man to pass me headlong has already seen James, because his drawn face tightens when we meet at a corner, and his chin follows me until we pass. I look for incredulous creases along his cheeks and I find them, and he picks up his pace, kicking his heels. The second time he comes into view, and this man is scarcely touching the ground he's running so fast, I'm only halfway around the track, which should put James about back where we started. When he sees me, the man falters. He breaks his stride, and I lift my right hand in greeting, as if I'm a brother runner, one of the clan, in the club. He barely manages to pick up his pace again, and he doesn't smile at all, and before he passes, I surge forward like I'm trying to improve my time, or something. I almost lose it and start giggling hysterically, but I'm breathing too hard. I think James has almost reached the midway point again when the human tendon passes me for the third and last time. He finds me almost at the finish, slowly jogging, drinking from a grape juice-box that I've taken from my pack. James, now slowly catching up to me from behind, is sipping a Tropical Medley.

Wednesday, August 24. I'm coming out of a health food store, and I see a man sitting back among the exterior shadows of the L-shaped building. Twitching my head I notice his dreadlocks, his brown clothes, his beard, and his posture. He asks me if I could spare some change.

"Change I can spare," I say, hurrying on, "it's time I don't have." I hustle towards my father's car and imagine him jumping up to pace me, walking a loophole into my argument, which isn't an argument at all. Friends are coming to dinner. The rush to get home has already caused me to buy a small cannister of pesto when I really needed a large, and to forget the toast for tomorrow's fresh eggs. I'd give him change if he'd do that, if he'd pace me. I'd give him the change banging against my father's keys.

Thursday, August 25, I see how long a cabbie will wait outside my house when I tell him I've forgotten something and have to dash back inside for just a moment. He smells like a man who stood in front of me at the bank today, dressed in a white t-shirt and tattoos, very dirty, very tobacco stained, so much so that I could smell him all the way out the door. While I was scribbling almost illegibly on my deposit slip at the window counter, he walked in the door of the bank, and as I turned to get into line, he beat me to the last stanchion before the teller. His white-faced look said, "I know you got here first, filling out your slips and all, but what's *really* important is who gets to the front of the *line* first, isn't it?" I let him see my ultra-disappointed smile and reach out with one hand to smack him on the ass about half as hard as I can, then jump back to let him cool off. I ignored his angry laments, my mind on something else.

When the driver finally hauls himself half way out of the cab, I run frantically down the steps, waving my long wallet over my head, looking embarrassed and relieved so he'll sit down again. I throw open the door and drop myself into the back seat.

"Airport, please, sorry about that." The cabbie, dark blue backwards baseball cap on his head, pulls out.

"Stop!" I shout. "Stop, stop, stop!" and he slams on the breaks, like he's just missed a dog with his front tires but it's still under his car.

The driver jerks around, and tightly grips the top of his fake leather seat, crinkling the green plastic in front of me. His eyes issue the burning irritated question of, "What the hell now?"

"I...will...be...right back. I *promise*," I say, and so do my eyes, apologetically, lingeringly, as I slowly move my hand to the door handle. Then, popping out, I sprint inside my house like smoke is seeping out an open window, and I'm holding an extinguisher. Inside, I flip on the tube and flip through the channels, occasionally flipping through the Venetian blinds. In 10 more minutes the yellow car finally disappears in a rush of rubber and smoke.

Friday, August 26. I pass the grocery cart of a wino, whose back is turned as he digs through the great green dumpster of a Chinese restaurant. I roll up a 10 dollar bill and poke half of it into the top of his partially-swilled 40 ounce bottle of malt liquor. I regret not getting the wino to somehow disinfect the mouth of the bottle before he drinks, since he's going to be pulling loose that germ-covered American bill.

Saturday, August 27, I get a call from an old woman who wants to return her dishwasher. My home number is only one digit away from some unmentionably huge department store, and after several calls from customers I've learned to adapt at a moment's notice.

"Hello," I say, hoping to hear from James.

"Hi," comes an elderly female voice as thin and fragile as peanut brittle, "I've got this new washer from you guys, and it really doesn't work. I... I was wondering if maybe..."

I imagine she's a grandmother, dressed in a light, flowery skirt. I think about who she is, this someone who'd call a store, get a private residence, and not make notice.

"Ma'am," I interrupt, "I'm not who you think I am. This is the women's department. I'm not saying you're not a woman, but I think maybe you'd do better with hard wares. Would you like me to transfer you?"

"Yes, please," she answers, a touch of uncertainty crackling through her tones. I make a "transfer sound" into the phone, wishing I had a friend over to wave frantically at.

"Hello," I say, plummeting my voice to that of a deep, dark, soft baritone. "Undergarments."

There's a moment of silence.

"Did we just speak?" squeaks the petite voice from the phone.

"No ma'am, that was Cherrylee ... Crystal ... Phosenseffer ... son...son." I answer, biting my lip. "Looks like we're having some trouble with our phone system here. The computer's down. Electrical problems. Our boss's dog ... you should've seen it. You got a sink that needs fixing? I..." I should be interrupted about now.

"No," she snaps weakly, like she just witnessed an accident. Then she gets her verve back up, "I've got a washer, and I need *hard wares*."

"Yes ma'am. Dinnerwares, coming right up. Please hold. Beccccccccooooop! Howdy Lady, I hear you've got some goldfish you wanna return, no just kidding. You've got a problem with your washer? Well, I'll tell you what," not giving her a chance to speak, "you just bring in your yellow slip ... you, uh, you *do* have your yellow slip?"

"Yes, I..."

"Good. You just bring that little yellow slip in here with you when you come, and you walk right up to the customer service desk, ma'am? And, with *confidence* now, because you deserve this." I say convincingly, shaking my finger at nobody in my living room, "you just walk right up to them, and you slam that slip down on the counter, and you tell them you're not satisfied. *Not satisfied*, remember that. This is too big a store, *we are too big*, not to satisfy you, do you understand? You are important. Bring the yellow slip, be polite, say you're not satisfied, and we'll take care of everything, all right? You want a new washer, *you got it*."

"Oh, then. Thank you so very much," she says, in a sincere, up-lifted voice.

"Whatever, Ma'am. Do something nice for someone today." I hang up.

Sunday, August 28. I get a message on my cell phone, "Braeden, are you there? No. Ok. This is your pop. I just wanted to tell you another reason that I like so much going, ah, being in Eugene is to see you so often, and that's just, that's really wonderful, and ah, I, I really love it. So uh, it wouldn't be so easy uh, to leave. Bye, bye Braeden." I press the phone to my ear and listen to the message in a trance at 40 miles an hour. I listen to it three times in a row, thinking his voice sounds shaky, as though he'd been crying. ¶

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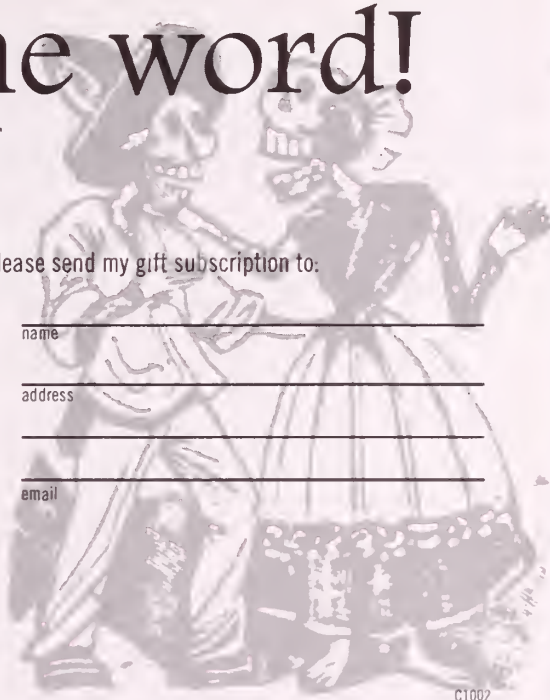
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Figure 2.
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Food Not Bombs turns 20



On June 4th, 2000, Food Not Bombs (FNB) celebrated its 20th anniversary. Thousands of people gathered for a beautiful day of music, radical politics and amazing free food. The all-day, free festival, Soupstock, was a celebration of FNB's social justice work as well as an example of FNB's commitment to community building, reclaiming public space and collective action. With 15,000 people coming out to celebrate and hundreds of activists working to make the day happen, Soupstock was both exhilarating and historic.

There was food in three different areas of the park, where you could get anything from stir-fry to vegan brownies to nectarines. Although some people seemed puzzled that all the food was free, it is this concept of sharing food that FNB has become known for. It is not only a way for people to directly oppose capitalism that restricts food by the use of price tags, it is also a way to build community. Thousands of people congregated in Dolores Park to enjoy a meal together, which was made possible by the collective efforts of many local activists. There was an outdoor kitchen set up with uniquely decorated tables where volunteers, old and new, chopped veggies for the stir-fry that was cooking a few feet away. Throughout the day, people who had just shown up for Soupstock would volunteer to help in the kitchen, and then become part of the larger vision of collective work producing for the community.

A variety of speakers and performers transformed Dolores Park for five hours. The music ranged from traditional Tibetan folk music by Tsering Wangmo and Nyimagyampo to Diamond Dave and his son Ubi doing an acoustic song to the turntable music of DJ Disk and DJ Flare from the Invisible Skratch Piklz. There was also the cello playing of Bonfire Madigan, the awesome labor songs of Folk This!, Sleater-Kinney (three women who know how to rock!), the guitar playing of Vic Chesnutt, local punk band Tilt! and Washington DC's Fugazi.

There were a number of guest speakers who addressed audiences about salient local and global community issues. Ted Gullicksen of the

San Francisco Tenants Union spoke about gentrification and landlords getting rich at the expense of families, working class, students, and many others as the days go on. Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez of the Institute for Multiracial Justice spoke about the use of food as a weapon in U.S. foreign policy against Iraq. Lily from Just Act brought up the issue of youth organizing and direct action against global capitalism. Keith Savage and San Francisco FNB members talked about the importance in taking action against the injustices around us, and holding on to our political visions.

While all this was happening on one side of the park, workshops were happening in a tent on the other side. Four women put together the first workshop titled, "Smashing Privilege ... Not Just Capitalism," that dealt with youth organizing, white supremacy and creating alternatives. There was also a consensus workshop, and women's self-defense done by Girl Army. These workshops were not only about sharing information but also to show people how FNB works towards its vision. The workshops were also designed to empower individuals. All the workshops were put together and facilitated by people within the activist community. As the mission statement says for Soupstock, "We have come to realize, or perhaps knew all along that in order to succeed we must share our skills with one another; we must teach ourselves." We have all the skills and resources we need to succeed right here in our community. Another example of this was the pedal camp where free bike advice and assistance was offered to those who were eager to learn more about repairing their own bikes.

If someone wanted to take a break from thinking about politics and how to bring capitalism to its knees, they could wander over to the DJ Dance area sponsored by Predawn, an amazing group who love to dance and work to keep the underground music scene alive.

Different members of crowd had all came for different reasons, but once they arrived they were participating in a FNB event which values



and Soupstock turns out 15,000

by Lauren Rosa and Chris Crass
photos by Pao Chiu

cooperation, nonviolence and most of all respect. Throughout the day, police, residents, and participants commented that they were impressed with FNB's style of organizing that promotes a high-energy yet peaceful environment. Loretta, one of the Soupstock organizers, commented that, "the peaceful nature of the day, showed a respect for the principles of Food Not Bombs on the part of thousands of people and it also demonstrated that we can build non-violent community."

In many ways this was the largest event San Francisco's FNB has organized. It was the largest sharing of free food ever done in the area, the largest crowd FNB had ever seen, and perhaps the largest scale volunteer effort. Over 300 people worked side by side to not only spread the messages about alternatives to capitalism and hierarchies, but also showed the feasibility of such alternatives by practicing them all day long.

"We were seven people who organized and delegated responsibility successfully, and in the end we had over 300 people helping out," said Kerry Levenberg, a Soupstock organizer. "It was a direct application of what we have learned about decentralized organizing."

Long time organizer and social justice superstar, Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez, who spoke at Soupstock commented, "I will never forget the sight of 13,000 people (by police count) in Dolores Park celebrating the 20th anniversary of Food Not Bombs with so much joy, sheer pleasure and spontaneous unity. To be part of that was to feel the Power of the People in one's veins. Yes, the crowd was overwhelmingly white, and surely not everyone was there for mostly political reasons. But to imagine a day when their numbers might combine with as many youth of color equally dedicated to social justice brought a vision to sing and dance by, to treasure in the years to come. The message went out so loud and clear: Food Not Bombs, three simple words that translate: revolution."

Soupstock's significance lays not only with the sheer size of it and

the enormous organizing that was involved, but with the celebration of 20 years of Food Not Bombs activity and organizing. FNB has impacted tens of thousands of activists in the United States and around the world. FNB's commitment to direct action politics and cooperative organizing combined with its passion for liberation has made it an important element of the larger social justice movement.

The 20 year celebration of FNB was fundamentally a celebration of the millions of hours that people have collectively invested into building Food Not Bombs: long meetings, cutting vegetables, collecting donations on a cold winter day, sharing free food at yet another protest to stop the US bombing of yet another country, the time spent making phone calls, putting on events, organizing actions to shut down global capitalism and so many other small details, like getting spoons, finding ladles or waiting until finally someone volunteers to facilitate the meeting. These are the actions, both amazing and mundane, that have made FNB happen all of these years and at Soupstock people celebrated with great pride all of those who have made it happen these past 20 years.

Twenty Years of Food Not Bombs a history of breaking bread for social justice

Food Not Bombs was started in 1980 by a group of anti-nuclear activists in the Cambridge/Boston area who wanted to combine street theater and food sharing as a method to educate the public about military spending. Sharing free food in highly visible public areas was a way of not only providing free, healthy food to folks who were hungry, but was also a great way to get literature out and publicize protests and actions. Boston Food Not Bombs soon realized that the need for free food to people who were homeless and hungry was enormous. The number of people living on the street was increasing drastically throughout the '80s as social spending was gutted and military spending enlarged. FNB in Boston helped create important links between direct food-service providers and

Food Not Bombs groups started in San Francisco and Long Beach in the late '80s. San Francisco Food Not Bombs began sharing free food in Golden Gate Park in 1988. FNB members were arrested on several occasions for serving without a permit — a business and homeowner association wanted to drive FNB out as part of an overall strategy of forcing out all homeless and poor people from the Haight-Ashbury district (famous for the Summer of Love in '67 and the spirit of the hippies). Arresting FNB members proved to be a major political mistake on the part of City Hall and an enormous break through for FNB. People being arrested for sharing free food made the headlines and greatly expanded the interest in the group.

poor people, the growth of corporate power and the greed of a capitalist economy. FNB is also working to develop alternative models and visions of a new society. FNB groups share free food as a demonstration that hunger and starvation are the result of production and distribution systems that benefit the rich and that there is in fact enough food for everyone. FNB groups practice anti-authoritarian, cooperative forms of decision making that promote empowerment and group responsibility as oppose to coercion and submission.

In the many different areas that FNB has operated and continues to operate in over the last 20 years, they have experimented with community garden, micro-powered radio stations and needle exchange programs. They have also worked at building coalitions between environmental-



Food Not Bombs grew by leaps and bounds throughout the 1990s. Several factors played important roles in the growth of FNB into an international network of active local groups. The Gulf War in 1991 was a wake-up call for many activists, particularly youth who had never seen such a massive display of US military power. FNB groups that were already active, like in Long Beach, Boston and San Francisco, immediately dived into intense anti-war organizing. Long Beach FNB served thousands of hungry protesters at the L.A. Federal building week after week. The San Francisco group set up a 24-hour field kitchen in Civic Center and provided both food and up-to-the-minute information about the war and anti-war activities. In other areas, activists started FNB groups as part of showing opposition to the Persian Gulf War. East Bay Food Not Bombs, one of the longest running and most active groups, started sharing food in Berkeley during this time. FNB chapters become meeting ground for younger, newly-radicalized activists to work with and learn from long-time organizers.

As new groups started up in different locations, FNB activists would converge at various mass actions and events. The Peace Camp at the Nevada Test Site and Bread & Puppet in Vermont served as such places where FNBers would meet each other and cook together for the larger activist community. In 1992, the first FNB gathering was held in SF during the Columbus Quincentennial/500 Years of Resistance actions. Several dozen activists from around the country came together to share ideas, skills and stories. The gathering confirmed that FNB was indeed an emerging movement.

As information about FNB spread through alternative press zines and political bands, FNB chapters started up everywhere. In cities, towns, rural areas and suburbs across the United States and around the world, FNB groups started sharing food and organizing. In 1993, when the police started arresting FNBers in SF, the blatant political repression made national news and further spread the message of Food Not Bombs.

Throughout the '90s, hundreds of FNB chapters were started, some lasting a couple of months, some lasting several years, and some haven't stopped since.

The grassroots nature of the Food Not Bombs organizing style has allowed it to grow in diverse areas and it has given thousands of people opportunities to experiment with consensus decision making, non-violence as both a theory and a practice. FNBers have learned about, experimented with, and utilized direct action organizing that recognizes the power that people have to act locally and globally against injustice. While FNB groups have actively protested against injustices such as police brutality, toxins in our food and communities, police actions against

ists, unionists, students, faith-based groups, community groups, social service providers, and all kinds of social justice activists. In Germany, the FNB groups work hard to defend and expand immigrant and refugee rights, in addition to challenging capitalist consumerism. In Australia, FNB groups also took food to striking dock workers, in addition to their regular community meals. In Canada, FNB groups have been active in massive protests of the unemployed and the poor. Throughout the US, FNB groups have worked with Earth First! and other environmentalists on countless campaigns to stop clear-cutting of redwoods and to stop toxic dumping in poor communities. FNB groups around the world have been very active in the struggle to stop police brutality and free Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier and all political prisoners. FNB's political outlook and organizing practice puts solidarity building at the center. FNB groups regularly work to provide food for rallies, protests, conferences and actions around many different struggles. This desire to build solidarity between groups and connect the issues has been critical work, as it both builds the larger movement and puts forward the radical vision that liberation will come about through collective struggle against all forms of oppression.

In addition to helping the larger social justice movement grow, FNB activists have also worked hard to develop FNB as a network of local groups united by politics and practice. Over the past 10 years there have been dozens of FNB gatherings, from the international gathering of '95, in San Francisco, that truly solidified FNB as a movement, to regional gatherings across the US and in Europe. The gatherings — like the daily activities of local FNB groups — are an opportunity for people to learn from one another, develop ways that they can support each other and challenge existing social relationships of domination while also nurturing our visions of society based on mutual aid and cooperation.

Join us in our efforts to change the world.

For more information on starting an FNB group in your area or for ideas on improving your local group, write to East Bay FNB at 3124 Shattuck Ave. Berkeley, CA 94705 and send \$3.00 for "The World Food Not Bombs Operator's Manual." FNB webpages are on the internet and San Francisco FNB can be reached through sf@fnb-4.tao.ca or PO Box 40485, San Francisco, CA 94140.

the Underground Publishing Conference

Bowling Green, Ohio • June 2000

by jason kucsma



This past June, around 400 people converged on a small town in the Northwest corner of Ohio to meet and exchange ideas and inspiration with other folks with similar and divergent interests. Bowling Green played host to a weekend of workshops, panels, discussions, and other events for people from all over North America who came to talk about what they do, why they do it and to hear why others are involved in the work that they do. The conference attendees ranged from small-press comic artists, zine editors, writers and readers, academics, and pretty much anyone else who was interested in seeing what the underground media is up to these days and where it is headed in the future. The following is an adaptation of the mission statement from the booklet that served as the introduction to the conference and the list of scheduled workshops that happened throughout the weekend. Plans for next year's conference are still tentative, but based on the feedback from this year, it would be sorely missed if the Underground Publishing Conference didn't happen again in 2001. Please feel free to contact upe2001@hotmail.com for more information or suggestions. Thanks again to everyone who made this year's conference a success.

Weeds and the Underground Press: Our Mission

In her book *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996) cultural historian Frieda Knobloch compiles a historical account of agricultural practices that exposes the arbitrary relationship between agricultural

ideas and the domesticating practices those ideas justify. She describes the violent colonization of land and people throughout American history and concludes, "not one atom of this history was inevitable, regardless of how naturalized it has become." In other words, the notion of history as a natural progression where humans are only minor actors is not only false, but it serves to reinforce the idea that we have no control of our lives and that we should shun any attempts to take control of the present or future.

How is this relevant to the world of underground publishing or communication? In the final chapter, Knobloch discusses the role that weeds have played in agricultural history to foil human attempts to domesticate the land. Despite government agencies' and farmers' attempts to dominate the land, weeds continue to foil their efforts while reasserting their own individuality. Knobloch states "what is remarkable about all weeds, human and plant alike, is their persistence in the face of colonization, mechanical and chemical wars, systematic exclusion and policies of eradication." It is compelling to think that weeds, as organic inhabitants of the earth, have the power to monkey wrench elaborate colonization projects, and it is not much of a stretch to consider the underground press to be a form of weed in its own right. The concentration of ownership of mainstream media to the point that a handful of corporations own over eighty percent of the media outlets surely seems like colonization. And although the effects of this form of colonization are far less overtly violent than the systematic genocide of whole populations of Native Americans or economic sanctions against the people of Iraq, the domination of people is still occurring.

The absence of truth in the media, or the fabrication of illusions of satisfaction through consumerism, or simply an incomplete version of reality, are all methods of manufacturing consent in order to maintain control over people in a democracy – to retain order and submission when there is often no reason for it. This manufacturing of consent, then, is comparable to the colonizing work of scientific agriculture and the underground presses are the weeds foiling the whole project. Fortunately, there has been, and always will be, voices that push their way in from the outside; cracking the cement and blossoming beautiful dandelions. Independent media are those dandelions, and the conference was about their cultivation. Whether folks considered their work or interests to be political was not important. What is important is that they are creating culture for themselves and flying in the face of a culture that expects them to do everything but.



an impromptu hoedown with (from left to right) Mary Chamberlain, Theo Witsell, Laura Mintz, and Erin McWilliams



Ed (Project Atlantis) and Laris (Insound)



Artnoose!



UPCon2000 Display room

80 • people

The Workshops and Discussions

Copy centers are your Friend. Rich Mackin

Dead Anarchists I have Known: A slide show and narrative of Philadelphia's radical past. Bob Helms

The Popular Culture Library at Bowling Green State University. Alison Scott, Director.

Media Resistance: Julie Herrada (*Labadie Collection, University of Michigan*) and Peter Werbe (*The Fifth Estate*).

*Fuck Western Medicine: Natural Health Alternatives for Women. First Session for Women Only (male/female session on Sunday) *Amanda and Jonna.*

Prisoner Zines. Anthony Rayson

Independent Underground Comics Discussion. Shawn Granton, Matt Feazell, John Porcellino, Androo Robinson, Carrie McNinch, Ben Steckler, Suzanne Baumann, and Paul Hornschemeier.

Professionalism in the Underground Press Jen Angel and Jason Kucsma

Use Common Sense when Dealing with Strangers: The Bill Price Incident. Davida Gypsy Breier, moderator

Saturday Evening: Lost Film Festival
Live Show at Easy St.
Aloha, Lovesick, Minim, Stylex

Consumer Defense Corporate Poetry (111 Olscamp Hall)

The Power of a Jobzine: Staying Broad While Maintaining Focus. Bob Helms

Typography and Graphic Design. Ryan Bigge

Beyond Date Rape. Loolwa Khazzoom

Zines Alternative Press in public libraries. Julie Bartel, Brooke Young, and various others

DIY Indiefilmmaking: Good Films Cheap Scott Beibin (*Lost Film Festival* / *Bloodlink Motion Pictures*), Esther Bell (*dir -Godass*), & *Rusty Nails (Dir- Acne)*, Jon Fine & Michael I. Schiller (*co-dirs King Fu Jew*)

Zine Libraries. Deanna Hitchcock, Mike Q. Roth, and Travis Fristoe

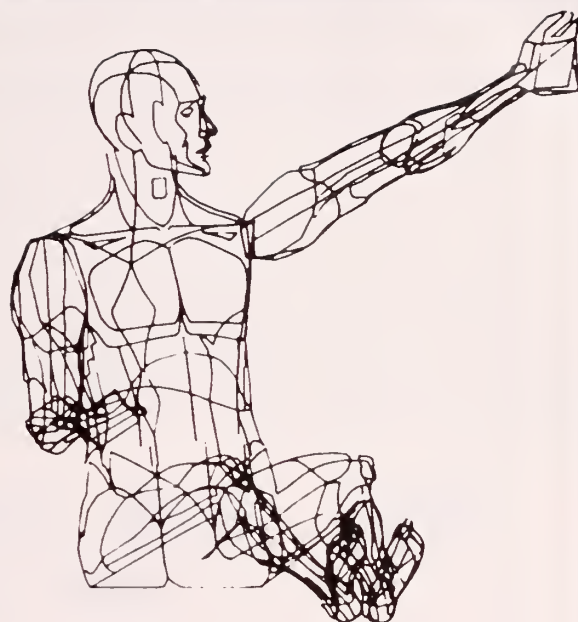
Activism: Personal and Professional. Davida Gypsy Breier

Digital Video filmmaking. Esther Bell

Distribution for your zine. Tree of Knowledge.

Independent Book Publishing. Various

Underground Independent Publishers Panel Discussion



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By this point in time, if you haven't heard about the World Trade Organization, you either live under a rock or have one for a brain. Now, for those enlightened among you, did you know the WTO could affect what you eat? Or that the WTO represents a fierce battle between those that control the food trade and those who actually want to feed the hungry? Politicians and media pundits speak the gospel of the all-knowing and all-good free market, lauding its potential to solve every social ill known to humankind. They say that "free trade" will carry the prosperity of the West to those "backward" regions across the globe. Yet they don't have a heck of a lot to say about the invisible hand's hand in perpetuating world hunger and poverty. Agribusiness stands at the apex of a system that denies the natural right of any living being to eat and have access to wholesome foods. The WTO is yet another trade-focused acronym agency seeking to keep power far, far away from the majority of people around the

The Food Conglomerates

The WTO talks on agricultural trade merely hint at the massive reach and immense power of the major agribusiness companies that control the manufacture and transport of what's in your fridge. Most of us don't really think about where the food we eat comes from. A farm? A factory? And we don't know and sure as hell don't hear much about who controls the food trade. How nice the world would be if food could come directly from nature or from friendly bakers. Yet a few "life science" or "life industry" titans (as they like to call themselves, though some suggest the more apt "death science" and "death industry") dominate agribusiness — they essentially are the business. These include Archer Daniels Midland, Monsanto, DuPont and Novartis. Ten companies own 30 percent of the \$23 billion commercial seed trade. Michael Hausfeld, a lawyer in a massive antitrust lawsuit being brought against

Free Trade Doesn't Mean Free Food seed patents, Frankenfoods, and



world. And what better way to keep people powerless than by keeping them hungry?

Among the many issues on the table at the ministerial conference of the WTO was the dispute between the U.S. and the European Union over genetically modified crops. Basically, the U.S. wants Europe to allow American gene-tampered foods to flow in and onto the dinner tables of Europeans. Europe is less than ecstatic to receive what activists have termed "Frankenfoods." It's understandable why the U.S. business and government headhones want the genetically modified crops to cross European borders: it loses \$200 million each year in possible food exports to Spain and Portugal alone with those countries' ban on GM foods. You need not be an expert in radical political analysis to know the U.S. will stop at nothing when the Almighty Dollar is at stake.

What does the WTO say about GM and food safety regulations in general? An international agreement on food trade established guidelines on when one nation could challenge another's food-safety laws as trade barriers. Power rests comfortably in the hands of major corporate masters within the food industry, not in the palms of the people who will be buying and consuming these agricultural products. Food-safety standards under the current system do not provide much protection for those consumers. Under this system, WTO member nations could ask the WTO to, among other things, "permit the use of methyl parathion and other pesticides even though the Environmental Protection Agency banned them because of adverse effects ... waive pasteurization requirements for cheese even though pasteurization ... is generally required by the FDA ... allow ingredient labeling that does not comply with FDA regulations."

the companies, says, "By the early part of the next century, less than a handful of corporations will possess control over the entire agricultural foundations for every society. You can see the potential for market abuse and manipulation."

The "Life Industry" involves huge transnational corporations who control the commercial markets of seeds, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, food and related products. And there aren't many big players in this game for global agribusiness domination. According to Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), global mergers and acquisitions added up to two trillion dollars in 1998, a 50 percent increase over the previous year. As RAFI puts it: "To conclude that transnational corporations rival the power of the nation state is a gross understatement." This is at the heart of the protest of multinational death deals like the WTO: companies are granted more power, privilege and protected rights than a country and its citizens.

The true giants in the life industries are in the food and beverage industry. According to a RAFI report, global food sales in 1997 were estimated at \$2,000 billion. Nestle raked in \$45.3 billion, Phillip Morris accrued \$31.9 billion and Pepsi earned a lowly \$20.9 billion. These companies and a few others are becoming the game in global food production, not just the winners. The rest of us are becoming the losers.

In the area of seeds and agrochemicals, the big players are Monsanto, Hoechst, Bayer and DuPont. Biology has become quite a lucrative market. The previously mentioned corporations were among the largest in the chemical industry and switched to biology. In 1996, Monsanto spent over \$8 billion on seed and agricultural biotech companies. Hoechst (based in Germany) merged with France's Rhone-Poulenc to form the largest "life science" company in the world. DuPont shelled out \$2.6 billion for Merck & Co.'s share in their joint business venture DuPont Merck Phar-

maceuticals.

In other grain news, Cargill, the U.S.-based company who is also the world's biggest grain exporter, intends to buy the grain assets of one of its few competitors, Continental Grain Co. This would give Cargill control over 45 percent of global grain trade (vegans and vegetarians take note — they would then control a third of U.S. soybean exports).

Right to Own Organisms But Not to Eat Them

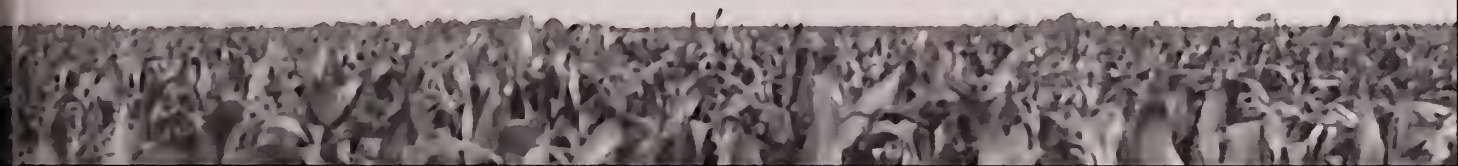
Vital to the players in this game over life and death are Intellectual Property Assets. This is what the big wigs want, not land or factories (well, they want those too). IPAs give the CEOs wet dreams. They make them drool. Intellectual Property Assets are basically patents. Companies obtain patents on anything from products to genes; this allows them to monopolize whatever they own the patent on. To merely hint at the scope

clauses of the GATT — now enshrined in the WTO — are precisely the place where the diversity of nature and the collective innovation of millions of farmers around the world are being defined as intellectual property of corporations like Monsanto." Circumstances such as biopiracy certainly forbode a disturbing new era of ultra-modern colonialism.

Frankenfoods: It's Alive!

But the hot topic on seeds and the "life industry" is genetically modified foods. Genetic engineering is a process wherein the genes of one food or organism are spliced into the genetic material of another food or organism. A popular GE product is a tomato with a flounder gene. But this is only the tip of the agri-iceberg of foods that have been genetically modified — the big companies want to expand the market for these " Frankenfoods." This has been a major issue lately and many

the terminator gene: agribusiness around the world Casey Boland



of this patent horde, some companies are investigating securing patents on human genes. For the time being, corporations like Monsanto and Aventis will content themselves with patents on seeds and other agricultural goods. Take a look at Novartis. Their 1997 annual report boasted them owning over 40,000 patents.

Activists and critics of this open season on buying genes have labeled it "biopiracy." They contend that these "biopirates" exploit the indigenous genius for Western capitalist gain. Some rich Westerners get exclusive rights to a plant, seed, gene, etc. while those who have grown and utilized them for centuries can only "legally" buy them. As a RAFI study illustrates: "The current systems do not protect the interests of community innovators, and ultimately threaten conservation and improvement of biodiversity worldwide."

Consider Basmati Rice. You've surely eaten some or seen it for sale in your local food store. But did you know that RiceTec, Inc. has the patent on Basmati Rice? In September of 1997, the Texas-based company won the U.S. patent on all Basmati rice lines and grain. Basmati rice, or the "crown jewel" of South Asia, is a major crop in India and Pakistan. Indian exports were valued at \$425 million in 1998-1999. There are reports that the Indian government will challenge the patent.

Big (and small, such as RiceTec, Inc.) companies seek patents on many things beyond what can be eaten. For instance, a U.S.-funded "bioprospecting" pharmaceutical program in Chiapas, Mexico, has aroused the ire of local Mayan organizations. They claim that the U.S.' \$2.5 million program steals their indigenous knowledge and exploits their resources. The project aims to study the pharmacology of traditional Mayan medicine. The project's commercial partner plans to patent some 2,000 compounds of the plant species. Vandana Shiva, renowned environmentalist and feminist, said about biopiracy: "The Intellectual Property Right

of you probably know all about it, so I'll keep this short. If you're wondering why agribusiness companies want to toy with the genes in organisms, well, obviously, it's profitable. Their justifications sound a bit more benevolent. They say that foods that are genetically modified can have a longer shelf life and increased nutritional value. They also claim that this will aid in the war against world hunger.

What they aren't telling us about is the profitability of GE seeds and the possible harmful effects. Let's take a look at these "gene giants," shall we? In and of itself, this process of messing with the genes of organisms isn't necessarily bad. Yet the control of this process is in the hands of a few major drug and chemical corporations. As one RAFI report puts it: "Rather than use the discovery of DNA and the mysteries of the gene to improve our lives, these selfish underachievers have grabbed quick payoffs by mass-producing genetically engineered products that cater to their traditional business toxic chemicals." Monsanto, Aventis and Novartis are the cream of the genetically engineering crop of corporations worldwide. Monsanto raked in \$3.1 million, Novartis \$4.2 million and Aventis \$4.6 million all in 1997. All together, the top 10 agrochemical companies accounted for 85 percent of the agrochemical market worldwide. Don Fitz writes in a *Z Magazine* article, "GE seeds have nothing to do with solving world hunger and everything to do with restructuring world agriculture. The plan of several multinationals seems to be to change the underdeveloped world to an 'American model,' where a few mega corporations decide what is grown and how it is grown."

Among the most controversial techniques of genetic modification is Monsanto's "terminator technology." The terminator does just that — it is a seed that is designed to kill its offspring. Such a method essentially forces farmers to rely on a few huge agri-corporations. Year after

farmers will have to buy new seeds. It is easy to see who has the power in this agricultural relationship. Camila Montecinos of the Chile-based Center for Education and Technology said "In the case of Terminator Technology, there's absolutely no agronomic benefit for farmers. The sole purpose is to facilitate monopoly control and the sole beneficiary is agribusiness."

While genetically-engineered organisms may be beneficial in regards to insect resistance, herbicide tolerance and as a drug for livestock, they pose many potential harmful effects:

- * They could introduce new allergens into the food supply. Say you are lactose intolerant. Would you expect those carrots you're eating to contain a milk protein? Proteins from traditionally non-food sources are also being transferred to common foods.
- * Genes are often used for antibiotic resistance in GE. This could reduce the effectiveness of antibiotics in combating some illnesses. It could also make some illnesses immune to antibiotics.
- * New toxins could be produced.
- * Toxic metals could be concentrated in the food supply.
- * They could poison wildlife.
- * Pest susceptibility genes could be squandered.
- * New viruses may be created.
- * Many unknown harms are possible.

Food for All... Who Can Afford It

Companies like Monsanto defend their use of genetic engineering by claiming that there is a food shortage. More food is needed to feed the hungry of the world. They play upon the myth that there isn't enough food to go around. This is not the case. Don Fritz says, "There is already enough food for everyone on the planet. People starve because food is produced for profit and does not reach the people in desperate need but with little money." Archer Daniels Midland asserts that it will take companies like them to solve the hunger problem: "When we say our mission is to feed the world, we're not just echoing some feel-good corporate catch-phrase," their web site says, "We have the production and distribution network in place to meet the daily nutritional needs of millions of people." So why don't they?

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN reiterates the point that food is a commodity to be sold and bought, leaving the poorest hungry. An FAO factsheet states: "World production of grain alone is over 1.5 billion tons, enough to supply the entire world population with two pounds a day.... There is enough food: the problem is that some people cannot afford to pay the price of available food. World hunger and malnutrition is a matter of poverty and accessibility, not production." They also counter the popularly held notion that the starvation that exists is a consequence of natural forces. Such acts of Momma Nature as floods, famine, droughts account for 10 percent of the hunger dilemma. The rest of the problem results from inadequate nutrition, which is a direct result of the lack of access to wholesome foods. And why do starving people have no access to good food?

In many cases it's because the food that they do grow is grown for export. This issue is way more complex than this, yet the major agribusiness corporations appear to play a key role in world hunger.

Over 800 million people are considered chronically undernourished, and that's only in developing countries. This problem exists right here at home. Consider someone who is poor, and when I say poor, I mean they earn below the poverty line. When you make barely enough to pay the rent and utility bills, you don't have much to spend on good eats. I know this from experience. For many years my mom had to raise her four boys with little help from dad. She got food stamps, but they only went so far. I remember Spaghettios and Kool Aid being dinner-time staples for a long time. McDonald's was a weekly treat. I recall my first dining experience at Pizza Hut — I took my soda cup home because I thought it was like Mickey D's who had disposable cups. And I'm sure my family was a hell of a lot better off than many others. Food costs money. And when you don't have it, your diet (and hence health) suffers.

How does agribusiness figure into all of this? They distribute the food. They set the prices. We're fairly fortunate in the U.S. and in the West in general that the big companies are based in the here. We feed off the food that's often times grown and exported from the "developing world." People go hungry here — that's not unlike whole nations of people who go hungry and for similar reasons — they don't have the money to buy food. And for someone in Ethiopia, they watch, hungry, as their grain is sent overseas. What's wrong with the life industry and monopoly control of it? Increased worldwide hunger and food that's hazardous to all of our health.

Think about most of the fruits and vegetables we eat. Most of it comes from places outside the U.S. or Europe, places like Mexico or Guatemala where food-safety and worker regulations are much lower. If you travel to Mexico, you are warned not to drink the water and to peel the skins off of fruits and vegetables. Those same fruits and veggies wind up on supermarket shelves in the U.S. A General Accounting Office investigation found that the FDA inspected a mere 1.7 percent of 2.7 million shipments of fruit, vegetables, seafood and processed food.

Dr. William Heffeman, a professor of Sociology at the University of Missouri, sums up this issue pretty succinctly: "Powerful multinational corporations search the globe for the hungriest people who will work the cheapest and sell the production in the highest consuming markets. Labeling, inspection, source verification, safe and sustainable practices are considered unnecessary costs and barriers to corporate 'free' trade. These companies don't care about people; they only care about profits."

According to UN calculations, the population of the entire world could have its basic food, drinking, medical and education needs met simply by a 4 percent tax on the 225 wealthiest in the world. Ignacio Ramonet takes this further by arguing that food is a political weapon. He states: "Hunger is a strategy pursued with unbelievable cynicism by governments and military regimes whom the end of the cold war has deprived of a steady income."

All together, the top 10 agrochemical companies account



The Path of Most Resistance

By now you must be throwing up your hands in despair at the hopelessness of the situation, but there's still hope. Many diverse groups oppose genetic engineering and the increasing monopolization of agribusiness. Europeans have already raised a big stink about the possibility of imported genetically-modified foods from the U.S. And the controversy is finally finding its way onto the table in the American media and among the public. Opponents are pushing for labeling of any food that has been genetically modified.

Crucial to the GE argument as well as the "life sciences" in general is the debate over organic standards. In 1998, a major battle was fought to protect organic standards. The defenders actually won, but the attacks have begun again. The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) is expected to introduce new regulations (if they haven't already done so) that will weaken organic standards. They would do this by allowing industrial-style factory farming to be considered organic and making it illegal to set standards higher than the USDA's, among other things. Essentially, the USDA will own the label "organic." It is expected that genetic-engineering will be allowed according to the new regulations, overtly or not. Many groups are ready to fight any attempts to mess with the extremely important organic label. I try to buy fruits and veggies labeled organic as often as possible (they're pricey but I expect the quality to be comparable to the cost). If organic standards were relaxed to allow things like genetic engineering, pesticides and sewage to be used in farming, then organic standards really are only nominally different than "conventional" foods.

Wanna avoid agribusiness entirely and check out DIY agricultural goods? Well, it's almost impossible. But many organic and foods found in smaller health food stores don't come from big-time "life science" companies (BEWARE- Whole Foods is an example of a major corporation that owns many health food "supermarkets" across the U.S., such as Fresh Fields in the Philly region, and others like Bread and Circus). Bucking the corporate-commodified food trend is the sustainable agriculture movement. This seeks to nurture the land and foster the growth of ecosystems and communities. A farm is considered a mini-ecosystem, with every part integral the health of the entire farm. And the farms are recognized as existing within a community, dependent on non-agricultural neighbors. Lisa Hamilton says in an old *Z Magazine* article, "Growers concerned about the environment and the public are the new farm revolutionaries, fighting quietly to reestablish local agriculture as a part of modern society."

Let's face it — most of us live in cities or suburbs. We don't expect to see farms and crops and windmills and silos. Yet many are beginning to change this. I know that there are several community gardens here in Philly where veggies are grown. Farmers' markets are common here and in most cities. Yet these often get their produce from major agribusiness conglomerates.

I read about Community Supported Agriculture in an old *Z Magazine* article. CSAs are another alternative to big, corporate supermar-

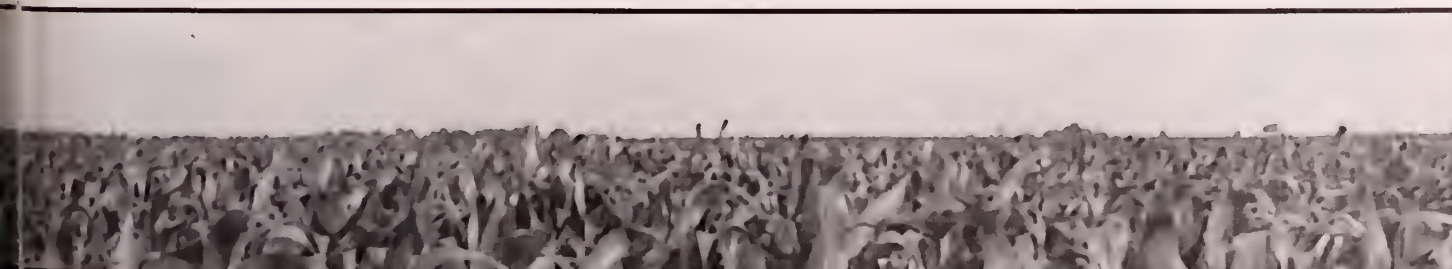
kets. This is new to the U.S., having been imported from Europe and Japan. There are also many food co-ops, some of which do not even accept cash (such as Mariposa here in Philly). It goes like this: a person or family or whatever pays a monthly fee, or weekly, or even seasonal, and they then pick up whatever they need from the store. Besides providing wholesome and organic foods, the point of all this is to build a relationship between farmer and customer. I'm not positive that CSAs are still burgeoning all across America, but either way, it and food co-ops are a positive alternative to the typical supermarket food purchasing experience.

What can you do? Buy organic. Shop at smaller markets. Protest. Write your congress people. Bomb ACME ... did I just say that out loud? And hey, why not grow your own damn food? DIY style! There are many things your average Joe and Joanne can do, but as with anything, getting organized is the only way to bring about real change. Do what you can and tell others. For more information on organic standards, check out the Organic Consumers Association: <http://www.organicconsumers.org>; (218)726-1443. A lot of the info in this article was culled from the web site of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI). I may be an info thief, but I'm not making any of this up. Contact them at <http://www.rafi.org>. €

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for 85 percent of the agrochemical market worldwide.



Service or Intimidation? Bank Fingerprinting

J. Gordon Lamb III

illustration by Nate Powell

Several months ago I attempted to cash my paycheck at my employer's bank. I had done this nearly every week for two years, but this time my state-issued driver's license was not sufficient identification. I was informed that since I didn't have a depository account with them they would require my right thumbprint on the check before they would cash it. Needless to say I became quite indignant (and, in all honesty, loudly profane) at this requirement. After arguing with both the head teller and the bank manager I realized that I was risking arrest and having an uncashed paycheck if I continued. Regretfully, I let them fingerprint me and told them I would never set foot in their bank again. While they were cashing my check I asked the teller if she also needed to see my driver's license? She said, "No, I recognize you." I told her that that was my point all along.

This may never have happened to you or it may be an occurrence you put up with every two weeks just for the convenience of cashing a check. Either way, if this is a practice that makes you feel uncomfortable you are far from alone. Unfortunately, the law is not on your side.

The practice of bank fingerprinting has been fairly widespread since 1996. The most common program that participating banks use is the Thumbprint Signature Program. This program was developed by the Texas Bankers Association and was an instant "success" in reducing check fraud by as much as 75 percent in some 38 states across the U.S.

While the goals of reducing fraud and protecting depositors' funds are legitimate concerns of any financial institution, the issue of invasion of privacy and the intimidation of honest citizens are also very important.

The most common exceptions people have toward fingerprinting are that it treats honest citizens like criminals, it has an unequal effect on the poor (because they are the most likely to not have depository accounts), and that there is no way of knowing where the prints go after they are taken.

For the purposes of this article I am concentrating on the third concern as the most important. Honest citizens routinely have to identify themselves when using negotiable instruments such as IOUs or



If [mandatory fingerprinting by financial institutions] is a practice that makes you feel uncomfortable you are far from alone. Unfortunately, the law is not on your side.

checks. Fingerprinting, while reprehensible, is merely another method of such treatment and while the poor are indeed most likely to not have depository accounts, these accounts are opened with the greatest of ease these days. Many times banks will offer checking accounts with a minimum balance of \$5.00 or no monthly fee. This is less than the fee many Check Cashing "services" charge to cash a \$500.00 check.

The most serious issue, in my mind, is what is called the "chain of custody" of fingerprints. In short, who has access to them and for how long and for what purposes? The argument has been made that since checks pass through so many sets of hands during processing that using them for criminal prosecution is nearly impossible. This argument doesn't really hold water, though, because the fingerprint is taken at the point of cashing, so there is no doubt as to whose print it is.

There is also the issue of the possibility of a fingerprint database being assembled by participating banks. The California Public Interest Research Group, or CALPRIG, echoes this concern. "Since there are no rules governing the safeguarding of fingerprints kept in bank files, they may be sold just as banks sell lists of other consumer information, or accessed by an employee, scanned into a computer, and misused. Government agencies could also potentially subpoena the fingerprints and use them for whatever purposes they choose," said a CALPRIG press release in 1997. While participating banks promise that "no database of signatures is kept," it would still follow that checks MUST be kept on file for a certain amount of time in order to fulfill the goal of reducing fraud. What the length of this period is and what happens to checks after this period, if there is an end, is a mystery.

Private citizens are not the only ones concerned about what this practice represents. Rep. Curtis Thomas, D-Philadelphia, PA, says "It's tantamount to an invasion of privacy." Also in Pennsylvania, Rep. Phyllis Mundy, D-Berks, called it "the ultimate big-brother-is-watching-you technology." Similar responses came to a head in the Georgia State Legislature in 1999. House Bill 50, if passed, would have barred the state and any state agency from doing business of any kind with any financial institution that required fingerprints from "customers and other persons." While this bill was defeated, the fact that it was read twice before the Georgia State Legislature shows that the privacy concerns voiced here have not gone completely unheard by the powers that be.

The American Civil Liberties Union, while voicing a reasonable concern on the issue, seems ultimately resigned to its existence. The executive director of the Colorado ACLU, James H. Joy, says, "You've given up a certain amount of privacy when you simply cash a check. I don't think there's any ready made use that the bank can make of a single fingerprint unless they're defrauded and want to catch the person that defrauded them." While this sounds logical on the surface, one only has to be reminded of the publicity programs used by the Social Security Administration. When people initially were repulsed and fearful of a national numbering system of the citizenry the SSA 'assured' them that the number would only EVER be used for purposes relating to Social Security requirements. Now that the Social

Security number is used on everything from college identification cards to drivers licenses and credit reports, it seems those 'assurances' were a falsehood. However sincerely the SSA might have meant them, they simply could not promise that the Social Security number would never be used for any other purpose. So it is, I contend, with fingerprints gathered by banks.

On the issue of invasion of privacy, the John Marshall Law School found that fingerprinting doesn't not violate fourth amendment rights because the 'victim' participates willingly. In the case of *Katz v. United States*, 389 U. S. 347 (1967) in which Katz was a bookie and the court used evidence from a phone booth conversation against him, the court found that "anything people knowingly expose to the public" is not subject to fourth amendment protection. The conflict I see when this is applied to bank fingerprinting is that the person fingerprinted is NOT 'knowingly' exposing his prints to the 'public'. He is conducting a routine, private financial transaction.

Since the fingerprinting program of banks has not been found to be illegal OR unconstitutional this article ends on a disheartening note. For those of you that object to the practice, voice this concern to the bank of your choice. For the record, Southtrust Bank (where I had my confrontation), Bank of America and the Texas Bankers Association were all contacted with regard to this article. None chose to respond.

Fingerprinting works, not through proof of fraud, but through intimidation. This is nothing new. A cop on the corner intimidates criminals, also. However, that cop isn't collecting personal information from everyone walking by just for the privilege of walking by. The bank, in essence, is.

The only reasonable and fair way to conduct this practice would be to allow the account holder decide if he wants people bearing his checks to be fingerprinted or not. This method would be discriminatory, but not wrongfully so, because it would be the choice of the depositor to conduct his business the way he saw fit. Giving this choice to the account holder would not only relieve the bank of this heavy practice, but put control back into the hands it rightfully belongs in: the customers it has charged itself to protect. ♪

(sources: www.fairhousing.com, [LEXIS-NEXIS Academic Universe](http://LEXIS-NEXIS.Academic.Universe), www.aclu.org, www.bankofamerica.com, www.gabankers.com, www.fdic.gov, www.bizjournals.com, www.uebankers.org, www.pirg.org, www.bankinfo.com)



The Sum of My Portfolio

(or... what I did with all that money burning a hole in my pocket)

For most of history, the primary measure of economic power has been in flux. In the Middle Ages, economic power was a combination of land and the ownership of labor. With inconsistent rates of exchange and few discovered or utilized natural resources, kings and knights went to battle for plots that produced exchangeable goods and the ownership of persons to work such plots.

In the past 200 years or so, we have witnessed a trend as peculiar as the rise of land and labor — the dominance of capital in the economic sphere. Now, of course, and for the past few centuries, capital has become equivalent to economic power. In many places, outright ownership of labor has theoretically been outlawed — even though the UN has stated that slavery of various types still exists in almost every country in the world. And land has become valuable only for the monetary value of goods it can produce, or the price it can fetch on the open market duly named capitalism, all of our lives have been shaped by it.

I find myself, for the first time in my life, with a steady job and a set number of expenses, in a position where I can not only pay off my debts but accumulate a small but growing amount of money.

It's not enough merely to have this money, however. The intricacies of capitalism mean that if I simply hold on to it, put it under my mattress or whatever, it will actually lose value; the same amount will buy fewer goods next year. To increase my holdings, or even to keep the same amount, I must take on some measure of risk.

This small sum caused me a bit of consternation. I didn't miss money when I didn't have any, but now that I had some, I wanted to hold on to it, and, if possible, obtain more. After a few days of considering and pondering, I came up with a three-pronged course of action. The bulk of the money I put in a simple, low-interest savings account of the type that nearly every middle-class kid gets when they're about six years old. The account pays out interest at about the current rate of inflation, thus I actually gain nothing; however, there's almost zero risk of my capital evaporating.

Another, smaller portion of my savings I decided to invest directly into the stock market. Another, smaller part went into the most risky, possibly most lucrative activity of the three: gambling.

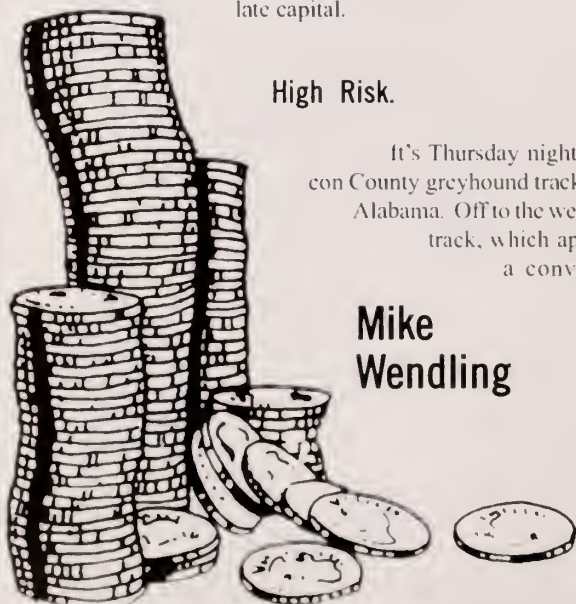
I found a sort of symmetry in this plan: with most of the money going into a low-risk, low-yield account, and a small part into the highest-risk, highest-yield plan. Stocks are supposedly somewhere in the middle. Now, I thought, I can begin to accumulate capital.

High Risk.

It's Thursday night at the Macon County greyhound track in Shorter, Alabama. Off to the west of the dirt track, which appears to be a converted high

school track-and-field stadium, a gorgeous red sunset is emerging from behind puffy clouds.

Mike Wendling



Nobody's watching this. Most of the track patrons are studying the daily program, filled with statistics they'll soon wager on. Many are watching banks of television monitors, where dog and horse races from around the country are simulcast to further entice to betting public.

One thing is eminently and immediately clear: this scene is not about the grace, strength and endurance of the animals about to race, as much of the track's promotional material seems to suggest. The scene is about one thing. Money.

Before each race, eight dogs are trotted out in front of the spectators. Some lag behind, some sprint ahead, but most are obedient. They seem to know, and perhaps they do know, that a race is about to start.

Their attendants at this particular track are all black kids, not one looking older than 20. This is more a reflection of the area than a comment on the racial predilections of the track owners. When politicians promised that these and several other tracks throughout the state would create jobs, they were telling the truth; the problem is that most of the jobs are low-paying, filled by leash-wielding kids or single mothers behind the betting windows.

In a twisted sense, however, these kids are the winners. Although they probably don't have much of a wage to burn on betting, even if they were allowed to (they're not allowed to even speak to any of the race fans), they will certainly go home with money in their pockets, whereas the bettors will, on the average, lose.

The attendants trot the dogs to the end of the track, where they wait for a while in a metal shelter. At "post time," the eight dogs are loaded into chutes.

At this point, if I am sitting on the benches outside the enclosed grandstand, I inevitably hear the dogs howl, and bark, and scratch at the inside of the chutes. The sound is discomforting, and loud enough so that I can hear it even if I am sitting near the front of the enclosed lower level. If I happen to be sitting in the grandstand (ticket cost: \$2), I can hear none of this, and indeed, little at all; the beeping and whirring of the betting windows has ceased, and most people quietly clutch their tickets and watch.

Soon after, the metal structure that the dogs chase starts up with a squeal at the far end of the track. At some other tracks, the bait is in the shape of a rabbit. At this track, it's a big white bone. It could be an eel, for all the difference it makes: all the dogs need to run is the motion, and once they get started, they probably don't need anything at all.

As the bait swings around the curve, the chutes fly open and the dogs charge out. The first stretch of the race is the most dangerous. The dogs jostle and bump and would probably bite if it weren't for the muzzles. Some are knocked over and understandably lose interest in the race, but this is rare. The greyhounds speed around the first turn, chasing the accelerating bait, and the one that jumps out to the early lead usually has a hard time holding on to win.

As the dogs round the second turn into the home stretch, the crowd gets more and more worked up, especially if a longshot has a chance at winning — for this means more money is at stake. The din reaches a crescendo as the dogs sprint across the finish line and slow, panting, waiting for the attendants to reattach their leashes. Some of the fans shout with delight or tear up tickets in disgust, while others try to out-guess the photo finish camera, which is used in most races to distinguish at least one of the top four places.

The winners are decided and the payouts are posted on the scoreboard according to the ingenious "parimutuel" system. If you go to a casino, you're betting against the house; but if you go to a race track, you are, in effect, betting against the other race fans, minus, of course, a few pennies per dollar for the track's owners. The track can never lose, and the owner's capital is perpetually safe.

The way it works is like this: a bet, once placed, is entered into a computer and compiled with all of the other bets. If a relatively sizable

proportion of people wager on a particular dog, the odds on that dog will go down, and if it wins (or places, or shows, or whatever), the payout will be relatively small. If, however, only few people bet on a particular winning runner, the payouts will be higher.

In effect, any one better is trying to outguess and outmaneuver all the others — almost like what economists call “perfect competition.” Perfect, perhaps, for the track’s owners.

After a few weekly trips I stop going to the dog races, having lost a small but — for my purposes — significant amount of money. Also entering into my decision is the news item that came out of another dog racing course in Birmingham, a sort of sister facility to the one I attend.

After the 12th and final race one night, one of the dogs got its muzzle caught in the electrified rail that the metal dog bone swings around. The rail somehow short circuited, and the metal structure circled around the track one more time, and struck the trapped canine, killing it.

A woman who witnessed the event was quoted in the *Birmingham News*: “They didn’t even care about the dog. They just wanted their money.”

Of course. At a very basic level, greyhound racing is not about the dogs. It could be horses or gerbils or robots racing. The track is not about the animals. The track is about one thing: money.



Of course, at a very basic level, greyhound racing is not about the dogs. It could be horses or gerbils or robots racing. The track is not about the animals. The track is about one thing: money.

Medium Risk

The act of buying stock is, in a sense, buying into — or at least resigning to — the dominance of a particular economic system. Yet within this system, it appears, there is still moral wriggling room. Should I buy an “ethical” mutual fund? Should I research each company thoroughly, and decline to buy ones that pollute, or make products in China, or test on animals?

In the end, my purchases and pass-ups fall into a rough pattern. I consider buying tobacco companies, but don’t. I consider buying Coca-Cola, but don’t. I stick to relatively noncontroversial industries. I buy Cisco, mostly because it is a strong stock, but also because there’s little direct damage done to the environment or the poor by internet routing switches. I don’t know whether to be pleased or not when, one month later, I find out that Ralph Nader owns shares in Cisco. In fact, Nader has actually earned a great deal of money off of Cisco, whereas I have not.

I buy bank stocks, and a mining company (but with no mines in places like Africa; this much, I check). But to play the game, I must inevitably compromise.

The stocks I own, along with the market as a whole, fluctuate. All the gains and losses are “theoretical,” that is, they do not become real gains and losses unless I hit the “sell” button. But they seem real enough to me. Yesterday my portfolio was worth \$520, today it is worth \$540. Or \$490.

Perhaps I’m being too literal in my interpretation of the market’s ebb and flow. After all, stocks, as a microcosm of the larger society, have been overcome by a new perception of value. In the past, companies produced things, sold them, made profits, and their stock prices (which are, in one sense, a bottom-line determinant of a company’s value) were reflective of those profits.

Today there are very expensive companies that have never made anything that you could hold in your hand, much less a profit. The stock market and our popular culture runs under a new set of rules: the perception of value has supplanted value itself.

I research the myriad of investment opportunities available to the left-thinking individual. There are indexes, mutual funds, growth funds, and environmental companies selling themselves on the pages of maga-

zines like *Harper’s* and *The Nation* and the *Utne Reader*. These companies promise social and environmental responsibility without sacrificing personal financial gain. I send away for prospectuses which are printed on recycled paper and have pictures of leaves and water droplets on the front cover.

What all of these funds and companies have in common, besides being out of my price range, is their fundamental assumption that the traditional wasteful, polluting, industrial goliaths of the past can be reformed and turned into “good corporate citizens” that can recycle all of their trash and become self-sustaining.

There is actually an index tracked by Dow Jones Inc. (yes, even the body that tracks companies is itself a company), the Dow Jones Sustainability Group Index, that follows “companies (that) achieve their business goals through the integration of economic, environmental and social growth opportunities into their business strategies.”

Certainly, companies will reform, if prodded by concerned individuals and — more importantly — market pressures (rather than any sort of desire to become a “good corporate citizen”). But where the managers of “green” funds see a better world through investing, I see something a bit less cheerful. I see a confused world, a vision that isn’t simplified by optimistic graphs on recycled paper. I won’t make the world nicer with my investment dollars (if that were my goal, I would be better advised to give the money to the Red Cross), but my near-random market choices are unlikely to hurt anybody, either. In a time when money rules the day, my small sum says virtually nothing.

The Tally.

Here is the final tally sheet of my investments after approximately 60 days:

	Begin	End	Gain/Loss
Savings account	2,000	2,010.28	+10.28
Stock market	1,300	1,222.78	-77.22
Total	3,300	3,233.06	-66.94 (-2%)

I can’t tell you exactly how much I lost on the gambling part of the equation. On my first few trips I made money, and was duped into thinking it might be a legitimate means of growing my “portfolio.” But soon after I started to lose, lost back all the money I had made, and then some. Soon after, I began to think of gambling as it should be thought of — as recreation — and I mostly stopped doing it a short time later.

After my little experiment in capital accumulation — or rather, depreciation — I’m now in the process of shifting all of my money into that simple, low-interest savings account. I realize that the bank then turns around and invests in stocks, bonds, and maybe even dogs, and turns around and pays me a very small sum each quarter for my trouble.

It’s not that I’m averse to risk. It’s that I realize that the few thousand dollars I might be able to accumulate over the next few months will not spawn any significant sum, and at the rate I’m actually losing cash (which could be spent on plane tickets, or gourmet food, or medical supplies for the third world) the element of chance I’m undertaking probably isn’t worth it.

Am I a bad capitalist? Maybe. But I like to think that what I lack in money management skills is made up in other areas — in other words, that I am more than the sum of my portfolio. c

the hitcher.

hey buddy! my name's bob.
i sell life insurance.
need a lift?

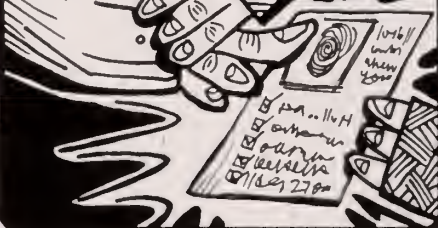
to: clamor
from: billy

yeah!
thanks!

1 hold on a sec. i gotta
frisk ya & make sure
ya got no weapons.



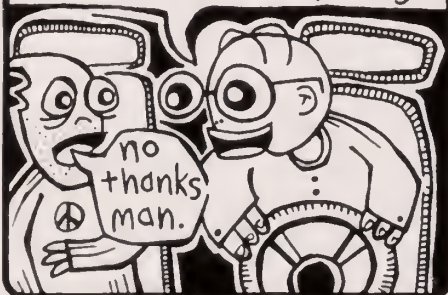
2 OK, gimmie a finger
print here. Sorry
man. i don't
trust you
hitch-
hikers.



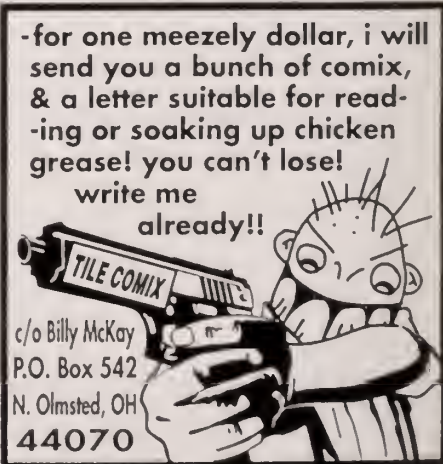
3 open up them eyes!
let's get a retinal
scan and we can go.



4 so anyhow, i sell
life insurance! hitch-
hiking can be risky.
would you like a policy?



5 that does it!! no-
one buys anything from
me! my life sux!! i'm
going to drive both of
us off this cliff!!!!



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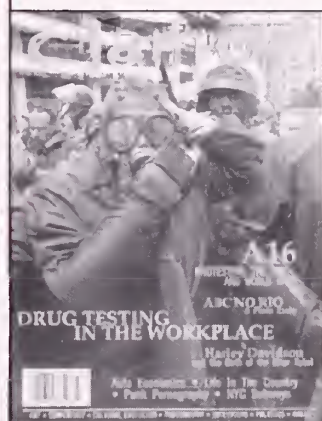
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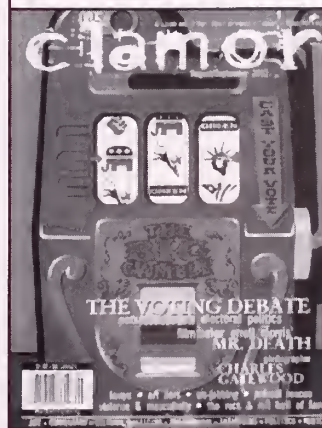
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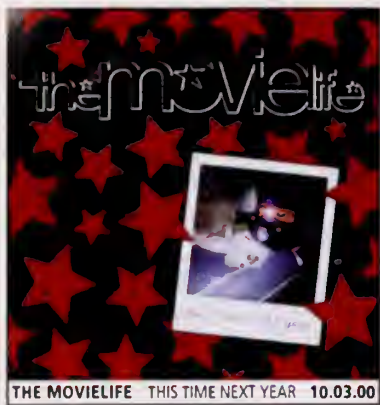


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